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THE VENEERINGS

By

Sir HARRY JOHNSTON

The Gay-Dombeys

Mrs. Warren's Daughter

The Man Who Did the Right Thing

THE VENEERINGS

A NOVEL

BY

SIR HARRY JOHNSTON

New York
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TO

W. M. J.

anything deemed good in this book is affectionately dedicated by its Author; in grateful appreciation of the sympathy shown, help given, and enjoyment shared during more than twenty-five years of a very varied life in common.

PREFATORY NOTE

Of all the stories Charles Dickens wrote none appealed to me more than "Our Mutual Friend," because it was the most modern in tone and setting (for even "Edwin Drood" is dated by Dickens some distance back in time). "Our Mutual Friend" was obviously intended to begin in 1860, and to end—so far as it terminated—in 1864. At that period John Harmon and Bella, Sophronia and Alfred Lammle, Georgy Podsnap were more or less at the beginning of their careers, at the opening of their great life experiences. It was an irresistible temptation to me to consider how they might have developed, what pursuits they would have followed, and with what results. I have imagined the fresh people who would have been drawn into their orbits, and the descendants these old and new characters might have left—if they have quitted the scene: though I like to think that a few of the original people of that remarkable transitional decade of the 'sixties are still here contemplating life as I am; preserved from dissolution by the products of the famous drug firm which the greatest of fiction writers first discerned in Mincing Lane.

As the temptation could not be resisted, and the theme similarly appealed to the imagination of my British and American publishers, here is the result.

H. H. JOHNSTON.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	The Veneerings and the Lammles	1
II	John Harmon	17
III	Sophronia's Frankness	32
IV	"All Kind Friends and Relations"	45
V	Chiefly Paris in 1867	73
VI	L'Exposition Universelle: 1867	91
VII	After Thirteen Years	114
VIII	Miriam Clements	138
IX	Mervyn in the Gave d'Aspe	160
X	Cambridge: 1882-1883	178
XI	1885-1887	196
XII	Mervyn's Marriage	222
XIII	Hetty Veneering	244
XIV	Mervyn's Journeys	266
XV	Graves's Disease	293
XVI	Mervyn in 1892	311
XVII	Mervyn and Elizabeth	330
XVIII	In South Africa	348
XIX	Mervyn and Reggie	373
XX	1896-1899	400
XXI	The Twentieth Century	422
XXII	Elizabeth's Wedding Morning	433

THE VENEERINGS

CHAPTER I

THE VENEERINGS AND THE LAMMLES

WHEN, in the summer of 1864 the affairs of the Veneerings came to "a resounding smash," we are told that they retreated before the financial storm to Calais, and that they lived on the proceeds of Mrs. Veneering's jewellery.

At first, they halted at a dingy hotel, cheap and out of the accustomed track of English tourists, in order to take breath and make their plans with deliberation. "They" included Hamilton Veneering, forty-four, "wavy-haired, dark"—but with a few silver hairs in his glossy chevelure—"tending to corpulence, sly, mysterious, filmy . . . a sufficiently well-looking prophet," as his creator, if not his passport, described him; Anastasia, his wife, about thirty-two, tall for an Englishwoman of those days, with very fair hair tending to cinder grey, an aquiline nose—a little red at the bump in the middle and at the tip—pale blue eyes, and a manner hitherto arch and propitiatory, but since their downfall rather plaintive; and two children, the elder a girl of four, named Joanna after her godfather (John Podsnap), and the younger a boy, Melvin, just two years old.

When Melvin "came to town"—a phrase Mrs. Veneering used in those days—it was the dead season in Brompton. Owing to his impending arrival, the

customary trip to Herne Bay or Ryde had been pretermitted, and the confinement took place at a time when their friends were scattered about the sea-coast and the countryside. In September, 1862, it became necessary to consider the baptism, name, and godparents of the new baby, Veneering's son and heir. They decided to appeal to the next most respected friend of the family (after Mr. Podsnap): dear, kind Mr. Melvin Twemlow, Lord Snigsworth's cousin and pensioner, who never left town because no one invited him to do so. Twemlow accepted; mainly because he had not the strength of mind to say "no." He purchased—very ruefully—a silver mug and conferred his foolish fore-name on the babe. Veneering stood proxy for the other godfather, Alfred Lammle, absent at the seaside with his wife; therefore the principal person in this story started life with the not very advantageous or stirring names of Melvin Alfred Veneering. His mother represented at the font the absent godmother, old Lady Tippins, who pleaded inability to write letters at a health resort as an excuse for neither accepting this responsibility nor sending a christening gift.

The eldest child, Joanna—afterwards known as Jeanne—had come at a time when the Veneerings were newly installed in a new house in a new quarter, and were striving to create for themselves a recognised position in the new middle class which was growing up as a secondary "Society" in Brompton, South Kensington, Bayswater, and Pimlico—one of the many outcomes of that far-reaching achievement of the Prince Consort, the great Exhibition of 1851, which raised Art and Commerce in public estimation and prompted the building of "Stucconia," on either side of Hyde Park. The Veneerings' first baby was an important detail in their *mise-en-scène* for promoting intimacy and inspiring confidence. The second child

was less necessary to these ends, since its father had got into Parliament; and it bordered on being a worry to a mother who wished to spend most of her time calling and being called on, lobbying and extending her social circle for her husband's interests.

So that those who dined and lunched with Melvin's parents—they seldom became more intimate—scarcely realised his separate existence, and ascribed his occasional fractious screams when he was teething to the staid Joanna, now short-coated and able to trot about the nursery floor or after her brother's perambulator in the Park. That is perhaps why no specific mention of little Melvin appears in the early references to the Veneering household.

He had outgrown his infant fractiousness and had acquired something of Joanna's staidness and solemnity by the time he was two years old; which was fortunate for his overworked, agitated, tearful mother, who in making her hurried preparations for exile deemed it best to leave the English nurse and nursemaid behind and look after the children herself, till they were settled down in France and knew if their much reduced income would permit of the employment of a French attendant for the children.

More or less on Melvin's second birthday, which was only ten days since they had given a large dinner party to discuss the Wrayburns' marriage, Veneering had come home from the City and confided to his palpitating wife that they must pack up their portable valuables, put house and furniture into the hands of agents, pay off and dismiss the staff of servants, and make up a cock-and-bull story to account for a hurried departure. Otherwise his creditors might foreclose and—and—they might be prevented from carrying off with them enough to furnish a modest income in some cheap, foreign resort. Fortunately it was out of the season, and nearly all their inquisitive acquaintances who had

dined with them the week before last were dispersed to moors and seaside, to the Upper Thames, and to the Continent.

Having reached Calais—whither they would travel direct by a discreet, uncomfortable Boulogne steamer which left London Bridge at 6 a.m., and called at Calais on the way—he would apply to the Speaker for the Chiltern Hundreds, and so close his Parliamentary career; and thrust on to his solicitor an assuagement of angry creditors, partner, and clerical staff by an assurance that a full explanation and an eventual satisfaction of all claims should be made. Had he spoken French at that time he would have said to his little world what Napoleon III. telegraphed from the seat of war, six years later: "Tout peut se réparer"; with just as much improbability of speedy reparation.

In a general way that excuse was given which covers, temporarily, a multitude of sins: a break-down in health, a mysterious malady which obliged Mr. Veneering and his devoted wife to proceed *instanter* to a foreign spa, and there to stay for an indefinite period.

In those days when news circulated so much more slowly, when people thought twice and thrice about sending a telegram, it occurred to no one to stay the departure of Mr. Veneering by a writ, "ne exeat regno"; nor, indeed, did the majority of Veneering's friends and associates know that his house was to let and his room at the Mincing Lane office was vacant till he was temporarily installed on the second floor of a drab-coloured, second-rate hotel in the St. Pierre quarter of Calais. They came here less for the immediate need of economy than for greater concealment—Veneering having thought he had descried on the quay, as the steamer churned her way into the harbour, two old friends of his prosperous days, whom he was not anxious to meet: the Alfred Lammles. But little Melvin—"Why not Mervyn?" he used to ask irritably

in his boyhood—and his sister Joanna or Jeanne had their first taste of misery, discomfort, and sleeplessness in their dark, dirty, bedroom-nursery at the Hotel des Quatre Saisons; for, from out of the grained woodwork, the skirting that bordered a wallpaper of dissolute ugliness, there would come at night-time swarms of thirsty bugs to suck their blood and raise huge red weals on their poor little bodies.

Their mother first shook and next slapped them for their inopportune wailing and whimpering till she discovered the cause. Then she was horrified, and, almost for the first time asserting herself, forced her husband by her upbraidings to seek actively some refuge for his wife and family which should at any rate be clean and free from vermin, even if retired from the view of their inquisitive, interrogating fellow countrymen.

Hamilton Veneering, at this juncture, wanted neither to reveal himself to the British Consul nor to the British chaplain; so he was forced, in his need for advice, to frequent the quay at the hours of steamers' arrival, and even to stroll drearily about the vicinity of the Casino and up and down the few fashionable streets in order to run up against the Lammles whom, on his arrival, he had striven to avoid. On the third day of his search they met, face to face, Alfred greeting him with a certain ferocious cordiality and Sophronia with an ironic smile. They had just seen the first garbled account of his departure in a London newspaper, and adjourned with him to the station refreshment room to enlighten him from their own experience as to ways and means, and how he should set about finding a temporary home.

Who were the Veneerings?

The name "Veneering," so far as I have been able to trace it, was probably (as "Van Eering") that of Flemish immigrants into Essex into Elizabethan times;

or they may have come from Holland as late as the reign of William III. One offshoot of this stock settled in the sleepy, peaceful town of Dunmow of the famous flitch. For generations they had been chemists, apothecaries, barber-surgeons, distillers, or dyers. Hamilton Veneering's father was a well-to-do chemist in Dunmow. He gave his son a good education for those days and then apprenticed him to a wholesale firm of drug merchants in Mincing Lane, with whom he had considerable dealings—Chicksey and Stobbles.

By the time this son was twenty-five he had risen to be the principal traveller and commission agent of the firm, and had greatly increased their business in the Midlands and Yorkshire. After he was thirty-five, his father put seven thousand pounds into the business and bought him a partnership. The Crimean War, with its unfamiliar diseases and its awakened responsibility for the health of our overseas' army, considerably stimulated the drug business. Hamilton Veneering, though he was afterwards unfairly depicted as a *parvenu* and a "climber," was far from a fool, and he believed fortunes might be made out of drugs. He was not content to jog along old courses in City premises of eighteenth-century pokiness, darkness, dust, and discomfort. He overbore the other partners —old Chicksey, who was getting senile; and the middle-aged, farmer-like Stobbles, who had country tastes, and gave himself up to the study of chemical manures and horticulture, and had almost lapsed into the position of a sleeping partner. Veneering prevailed, and made their office and warehouse spacious, well-lighted, and attractive, with an inner court-like front on Mincing Lane, a comfortable "samples" room, much plate glass and shining mahogany.

He interested himself specially in the panacea of the day: quinine, long known as Jesuits' Bark, but not until after the Crimean War prepared in a convenient

form for administration to fever patients; while the supply and the source of the precious bark were capricious and uncertain as they were restricted to the mountain forests of north-western South America.

Veneering, when the Crimean War was over, went to Amsterdam to secure a regular supply of "bark" from the new Dutch plantations in Java. He even put money into schemes for planting several species of trees in British India; and he brought out a rival tincture to Warburg's, which combined quinine with tonic acids and alkalis. He also visited little-noticed chemical factories in the Rhineland, where, since 1830, they had been experimenting with coal-tar products—dyes, medicines, germicides.

In 1858 his father died, leaving him another eight thousand pounds, which he put into the firm's capital. In the same year old Chicksey, the senior partner, also expired, bequeathing to an only daughter (Anastasia) his interest in the partnership, and fifteen thousand pounds. Veneering, who was then "a sufficiently well-looking" man of handsome proportions and insinuating address, promptly wooed and won the sentimental Miss Chicksey; and after the fashion of those barbaric days, when woman was little more than a chattel, dealt as he thought best with her fortune. Wisely providing against a speculator's vicissitudes, he put eight thousand pounds of her money into a marriage settlement, and sank the remainder in the firm's working capital.

They were married in 1859. In that same year he made several—what would now be called—"corners" in drugs which were coming into demand; and his speculations, which brought him first into touch with that shady character, Alfred Lammle, took a bolder turn outside the drug market and in the purlieus of the Stock Exchange. On the strength of having made three *coups,* which brought to his private account and to the firm about twenty-five thousand pounds, he

decided that a greater career lay open to him than control of the drug market. He bought his way into Parliament with an expenditure of five thousand pounds to secure an unopposed return from a corrupt little constituency on the Essex-Herts borders, and he moved from a square off the Clapham Road to a four-storied house in Brompton; laid in a supply of the finest wines, engaged a butler and two footmen, and a first-rate cook, and—always with an eye on the fickle Goddess of Chance—lavished expensive and saleable jewellery on his wife, and so won her to placid acquiescence in his schemes.

He and she together had a fluctuating income of about two thousand five hundred pounds a year, and they began, in 1860, to live at the rate of twice that sum. Veneering was led, by Lammle and others, into bolder and wilder speculations. He lost much money over his Indian cinchona plantations and the subsidiary company which was to finance them. But the crash came about a wild scheme connected with Cuba, the Southern Confederated States, and plantations worked by slave labour, the whole based on an impossible victory of the South over the North and the intervention of France and Spain—the sort of thing Lammle and his raffish associates would have got up and believed in.

In the summer of 1864, Veneering—grown stout and flabby with good living and Parliamentary sloth—lacked the energy and nerve to meet his losses, especially as Lammle had disappeared the previous year.

Thus, in a panic, the Veneerings fled to France to join the scattered colony of derelict, shady, or sequestered English folk—bankrupt in money or in reputation, guilty of the lesser misdemeanours outside the scope of Extradition Acts! or of blameless, genteel, and cultured quality, pensioners mostly, who found it pleasanter to live elegantly and joyously on the soil of France in the prosperous, gently-taxed days of the

Second Empire than to maintain a shabby home in Victorian England. Mrs. Veneering's settlement money would bring her in four hundred pounds a year; her jewellery, judiciously sold in Amsterdam and Brussels, might produce funds that should yield another four hundred pounds annually. Veneering was assured that, with an income of seven to eight hundred pounds, you might live like a prince in the Pas de Calais.

Stobbles, he considered, should put aside his gardening and his forcing-pits, and grapple with the affairs of the firm. Veneering could send his advice and suggestions from Calais, might indeed once more turn commercial traveller, get into touch with Java through Amsterdam, and perhaps acquire for Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles some "pull" over Dutch supplies of quinine. He would write to his solicitor (Mortimer Lightwood), and suggest that the new financial star of the second magnitude—John Harmon—might look into the affairs of the Drug House in Mincing Lane and perhaps set it on its feet again—make a good thing out of it—pick up the cinchona plantations in Mysore.

Hamilton Veneering was something of a snob, but much more of a dreamer, a mystic, and a mystery-man; a little careless about other people's money and reckless in backing his own ideas, yet not naturally bad and not without an element of shrewdness derived from his Hamilton mother, long dead, the daughter of a Scottish head gardener. It was curious, therefore, that he should so readily have come under the influence of such a type as Alfred Lammle.

A Cuban planter over in England and France, trying to raise capital, had introduced Lammle to Veneering, in 1859. It was afterwards said that Lammle was the son of a Liverpool merchant of dubious character engaged in the Brazilian slave trade, who had married a Levantine lady, the daughter of a Greek residing at

Marseilles, who was interested in his slave ventures. Another version had it that Alfred's father was a bookmaker and trainer of Newmarket who went out to the Levant in 1815 to obtain Arab horses from the stud of a Turkish Pasha, and brought home with him a Smyrna beauty as his wife. Certainly, Alfred presented a slightly "Armenoid" appearance, as we should now classify it. He was described thus by Dickens in the 'sixties: "Too much of him in every way; too much nose of a coarse, wrong shape; too much smile to be real, too much frown to be false. Too many large teeth, suggestive of a bite . . . gingerous whiskers . . . dark-brown, glossy hair . . . extensive shirt front. . . ."

Whatever his origin and ancestry he first emerged into the notice of the City as a man who had made money by some flashy scheme in Cuba, something to do with cigars or tobacco plantations, and had also profited from a speculation in Brazilian coffee and a gamble in Greek bonds. But at the age of forty he took a house in Sackville Street, Piccadilly, and settled down as a professedly wealthy "financier."

As a matter of fact, his luck left him in London. He came a succession of croppers—carefully concealed—over Spanish and Mexican stocks and shares, and backed several disappointing favourites at Newmarket and Epsom.

At this juncture, when he was inveigling Veneering into some of his schemes, he met Sophronia Akershem at a Veneering dinner party. Veneering vaguely alluded to her as a woman of property. She had a showy appearance and a bold manner, more attractive to men than the vapid conversation and responses of the average Victorian young lady. How would it be to marry her, and, when times were lean, to live on her income and generally gain by this marriage and the Veneering influence a footing in—at any rate the fringe

of—decent "Society"? Veneering, tactfully sounded, took up the scheme enthusiastically. He had known Miss Akershem at Harrogate years ago. . . . Father now dead, having bequeathed all he possessed—could not say how much—to Sophronia . . . only near relative an aunt. . . . Sophie was a deuced fine woman . . . surprised she hadn't gone off the hooks years ago—suppose it was because father kept her all to himself at Harrogate. . . .

Alfred Lammle felt sure there were other reasons in the background to explain why Sophronia with her striking appearance and her little fortune was still single at—should he say thirty-eight? And probably Veneering knew of these deterrents. Still, he could not afford to be over particular, as he was by no means anxious to expose his own affairs to the searching inquiry of a father or a brother of some more eligible *partie*.

Veneering and his obedient Anastasia—an easily humbugged sentimentalist—hurried on the marriage. They could not furnish their dear Sophronia with positive details about Alfred Lammle's fortune. But he was certainly rich, he had his fingers in so many profitable pies, *and* a house in Sackville Street; and Anastasia considered him a fine figure of a man, with beautiful whiskers and expressive eyebrows. . . .

Hamilton Veneering probably had his special reasons for pressing this marriage on Alfred Lammle. Sophronia was the illegitimate daughter of Horace Akershem, an analytical chemist at Harrogate, in the employ of the Corporation for testing and generally supervising the eighty-eight mineral springs. In his youth, as a medical student attending lectures on chemistry in London, Horace had fallen in love with a tragic actress of the day, Dolores Macbride, a woman some years older than himself who "had Spain in her blood, and the Jew." He loved her so much that he would have

married her, but her drunken Scottish or Irish husband being alive (and living on her earnings) he could not. Sophronia was the pledge of their affection, named after one of her mother's most striking character-parts. In course of time their passion cooled and they drifted away from one another. Horace Akershem sent for his widowed sister—afterwards Sophronia's "gorgon aunt"—to keep house for him. Dolores died of pneumonia on tour when her daughter was fourteen. Akershem, advised of this, at once brought Sophronia home to live with him, despite the sour objections of his sister. Harrogate arched its eyebrows a little, but it was politely assumed that its analyst was a widower.

Sophronia had inherited something of her mother's Spanish beauty, but she grew up under a blight. She had a disagreeable manner, and though her looks attracted, her ironic smiles and sarcastic tongue repelled Yorkshire suitors; who, indeed, were additionally deterred from honest proposals by the doubt as to her legitimacy and the extent of her marriage portion. Something about her inspired romantic attachments on the part of young girls. But mothers drew their daughters away, and Sophronia made no effort to retain friends of her own sex: there was nothing to be got out of them. . . .

Veneering first made her acquaintance when he and she were about thirty. He was visiting her father on business concerning drugs and Harrogate salts. She had a passing fancy for his appearance, his silky good looks, half-closed eyes, mysterious silences. She soon saw he did not intend to marry her: "Not enough money, I suppose," she bitterly commented. Yet she gave herself to him, thrust herself on him, perhaps hoping this self-abandonment—which he accepted with the nonchalance of a commercial traveller, accustomed to *bonnes fortunes*—might lead to some development, some change in the dreary round of Harrogate

existence. However, it led to nothing, not even to scandal. . . .

In course of time her father died and left her, in trust, two thousand pounds—all he had to leave, save a few hundreds to her aunt. The sole trustee, an ex-mayor of Harrogate, bought her an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds a year. Then life with her gorgon aunt, on narrow means, became intolerable, with middle age coming nearer and nearer. . . . She wrote to Veneering and asked if she might come and spend a season with them in town, at the same time hinting she had been left independent means by her father. He was a little afraid of refusing, and thought it might be better to acquit any obligation he was under by this hospitality. Then came the bright idea of marrying her to Lammle. . . .

After the wedding, on their honeymoon, a certain amount of truth-telling and mutual admissions became necessary. Alfred discovered that the supposed "little fortune" of Sophronia was no more than an annuity of a hundred and fifteen pounds; Sophronia, plying her husband with indignant questions, realised that Alfred Lammle was within measurable distance of insolvency. Of all his gambler's winnings he had barely fifteen hundred pounds left. The hatred they at once conceived for one another was neutralised by considerations of self-interest and a desire to be revenged on the Veneerings, who had "sold" them.

So they decided on a partnership: the Lammles against the World. They would return to their circle of acquaintances smiling, keep up a good appearance as long as they could, and together exploit any one foolish enough to be ensnared.

Their first two years of partnership, however, were productive of no ill-gotten gains. Sophronia, though she might show herself defiant of conventional morality

in the private discussions she held with her husband, was yet not as wholly bad as he, half bully and half coward. She withdrew from one or two schemes for extorting money or earning commissions because she had eleventh-hour scruples, or because something in her intended victim touched her sense of pity. So when Alfred's diminishing capital was near exhaustion and his creditors were beginning to foreclose, the Lammles anticipated the flight of the Veneerings by a year.

They tried first Calais, then Boulogne, Ostende, Dieppe, and had now—September, 1864—decided that an *appartement* in Calais suited them best as a rallying point. Once they had crossed the Channel, fickle Fortune changed her frowns to smiles. Without, as yet, having to resort to *escroquerie,* Alfred Lammle had the deuce's own luck at billiards, cards, and in backing French and Belgian horses. They won a prize of twelve thousand francs in a Belgian lottery; and devoting a portion of the proceeds to an early summer visit to Baden-Baden, came back with a further sum of fifteen hundred pounds won at roulette and rouge-et-noir.

So that when Veneering met them to solicit their advice, to ask even to be initiated into Continental life by their superior wisdom and experience, the Lammles were, for the time, so prosperous as to feel almost respectable. Their vow to revenge themselves on the Veneerings for the disillusionment following on their marriage had, for the time, faded from memory, or was, at any rate, in abeyance. It occurred to both of them that Hamilton Veneering might be useful in their schemes, and they were therefore prepared to help him and his aquiline wife to establish themselves at Calais.

So here they were, the three of them, sitting amicably at a square wooden table in the Café de la Gare, on

September 10, 1864, discussing an excellent *déjeuner à la fourchette.*

Mr. Alfred Lammle wore a stove-pipe hat with a narrow brim (the brim of Veneering's had the new London curl), a black alpaca jacket buttoning once, high up; a double-breasted white *piqué* waistcoat, and shepherd's plaid trousers of a bold pattern. His neck-tie was a "fold-over," dark blue, with white spots and a gold horseshoe pin; his collar a "stand-up," with blue vertical stripes. The trousers were of the peg-top style; and altogether he would have been deemed very dressy, in a kind of French-English fashion. He had still the refulgent auburn whiskers which, from the application of some form of brilliantine, had an iridescent gleam in sunlight, and he now grew a glossy, reddish-brown moustache with drooping ends.

Sophronia wore a round, Spanish hat of the type made fashionable by the Empress of the French. It was of black felt and had a scarlet pompon in front. Her glossy black hair was *en bandeaux,* with its back plaits stowed away in a blue silk net on the nape of her neck. Over a loose-sleeved muslin bodice (white, sprigged with scarlet sprays) she wore a Spanish bolero jacket of black velvet. Her waist was encircled with a scarlet ribbon-band, and the ample skirt, looped up in scollops over a stiff black petticoat, was of the same white, scarlet-sprigged muslin as the bodice. Her crinoline was enormous, but well off the ground. This exposed to view, when she walked, a pair of neat black brodequins rising above the ankle and the inevitable white stockings beyond the rims of the boots. She wore dark blue kid gloves with one button, and carried a minute blue silk parasol.

Ugly as her costume and her shape would have seemed to our eyes in these later days, she appeared very stylishly dressed for 1864, much smarter, "lavée

de sa province." She had learnt a good deal from a year in France and a little prosperity: not only to speak French—after a fashion and still with a horrible accent—but how to make up her complexion artistically, how to corset herself, what to eat and drink, how to make a salad, and generally how to make the best of everything, including her personal appearance.

Veneering was obviously impressed by the change which had come over this pair of adventurers and the assurance of manner they had gained by having money to pay their way. He was humble with them: felt badly shaved, badly dressed, and quite at sea over the eating, with only one fork and one knife, of this elaborate *déjeuner* (for which Mrs. Lammle paid).

"And now, Veneering," said Sophronia, over her *chasse-café,* while Alfred and their guest lit cigars, "if we are to help you, you must tell us precisely what your circumstances and your resources are."

Veneering gave a summary, purposely understating the total amount at his disposal, in case his rescuers wanted too large a commission. He added that he had got about three hundred pounds in ready money to carry on with, till arrangements could be made for the transfer to a bank in Calais of Anastasia's dividends, and until they realised the proceeds from the sale of her jewellery.

"Then," said Sophronia, "you and Alfred shall start at once for Brussels and Amsterdam to sell the jewellery; and whilst you are away your wife and I will endeavour to find a suitable house and furnish it. Garçong! Donnay mwaw l'addissiong."

CHAPTER II

JOHN HARMON

MRS. VENEERING wept a good deal at parting with her superb rings, bracelets, brooches, necklets, buckles, lockets, and watches; but inclined her head before the inevitable. "I'll give you better things some day, when our affairs get right again," said her husband, who was not an unkindly man.

Yet the prospect of house-hunting and shopping with Sophronia—who was, after all, a link with their showy life in Brompton—soon cheered her up, though Mrs. Lammle now took command and snubbed sentimentality and withered pretence. "If we are to see much of one another," she said, "we must do something about our Christian names, or my jaws will ache at saying 'Anastasia' every few minutes. . . . I shall call you either 'Annie' or 'Stacy,' and you can call me Sophie, as I've told Alfred to do."

"Dear Papa used to tell me my name meant 'a resurrection,'" said Mrs. Veneering with watering eyes. "Dear Mama died soon after I was born. Ah! Sophronia—I mean Sophie—I never knew a mother's care!" (tears again). . . .

"Well, I *did,* till I was fourteen. I can't say it made life much easier, or that I admired her kind of bringing up. But we've no time to waste over sentimental recollections. I've hired a carriage for the day—at your expense—and I've got an order to view a house which seems suitable; the rent asked is a thousand francs a year. . . ."

"My *dear!*" screamed Anastasia. "We couldn't *possibly*. . . ."

"*Nonsense!* A thousand francs is only forty pounds. There is said to be a good garden, and you could grow your own vegetables and fruit and keep fowls. We can but go and see it."

They went. After half an hour's consideration, Anastasia, on Sophie's advice, closed with the agent (who happened to be there to meet them) and took it on a yearly agreement; Sophie, who conducted the negotiations, having insisted that nothing was to be asked for fixtures in consideration of a half-year's rent being paid in advance, and immediate possession being granted.

The house, "Villa les Acacias," stood by itself, a mile to the west of the last houses of the town, the intervening ground being a rather desolate waste, with a canal passing through it. The large garden was enclosed within a brick wall, and there was a small field beyond the garden, demarcated by a rough paling. In the front garden were two large *Robinia* trees to justify the name of the villa, and a handsome *catalpa*. Facing the carriage sweep and entrance was a cracked marble basin; and a dejected-looking, greenish statute of a boy wrestling with a dolphin masked a fountain which had once played and refreshed the goldfish in the basin. The aspect of the house seemed sinister to Anastasia, who entered it with a little shudder; mainly because its windows were concealed by closed sun-shutters of a dull brown. Inside, it had a queer smell—a mixture of bad drains, fustiness, accumulated dust, exhausted air, the presence of mice, and the mould and damp of fireless winters when the house had been unoccupied; for the owner of it was said to be a heart-broken widower "longtemps en voyage, Madame, depuis la mort de sa femme."

The sanitary arrangements would, of course, have

shocked a house-seeker in the twentieth century; but only appeared to these women in the 'sixties a little worse than those they were accustomed to. Mrs. Veneering, on the other hand, was delighted with the drawing-room and the conservatory opening out of it, with the kitchen and scullery; and the back garden, though utterly run to seed and tangle and disrepair, and suffering from the summer drought and the autumn untidiness, had great possibilities. The walls had espalier pear trees loaded with fine fruit. To the children it was soon to seem a paradise.

The question of domicile and immediate possession being thus settled, it only remained to engage white-washers and paperhangers, carpenters and plumbers, to do a little necessary cleaning, adornment, and repairs. The agent suggested a firm. Also a notary who would transact the necessary formalities. Visits next followed to furniture shops. Thrilling bargains were achieved under Sophie's bold manner, slightly insolent self-confidence, and fluent British-French. By the time "the gentlemen," as Mrs. Veneering always phrased it—were returned from their long visit to the diamond merchants and jewellery firms of Belgium and Holland—an excursion which included a visit to Spa, where they gambled as much as the regulations permitted, and much "seeing of life" for Hamilton Veneering, under the guidance of his Mephistopheles—Mrs. Veneering and her devoted Sophia had Villa les Acacias ready as a very presentable home, with the fountain repaired and playing, and a *bonne-à-tout-faire* engaged at an equivalent of £18 a year to cook and do much of the house work, a gardener to reduce the garden to order and assist the cook in the house. Mrs. Veneering would have to attend to the children: "It'll give you something to think of," Sophronia had said.

But Anastasia was, in spite of nursery work and

much to do in the house, beginning to think herself actually happier than when she was the mistress of a fine establishment in Stucconia. Latterly, although she left all business affairs to her husband, she had been anxious about money. Household bills were mounting up, and Hamilton always postponed paying them till tradespeople began to dun; and they got behindhand with the servants' wages, who consequently became insolent. The air of London did not agree with her, who had been brought up at Blackheath and Chiselhurst. Already she felt better for wind-blown Calais and a semi-country life. She enjoyed the care of her poultry; the children were good and obedient, and so enraptured with the large garden, its hiding places and rambling outbuildings, the acquisition of a house-dog of the typical mongrel, affectionate type, that they gave her little trouble between their getting up in the morning and their going to bed at night. She was also glad to rest and to live very quietly, because she knew that another child was on its way, and that she would be confined again somewhere about Christmas time.

She did, it is true, feel a little lonely and chagrined when Hamilton departed in October with the Lammles to carry out some scheme they had planned, and stayed away all November. But she gathered from his occasional letters that the scheme was bringing in money. He had come to a sort of understanding with her that the Calais house and household were to be run on her four hundred a year, and that she was to let him use the other half of their income—that which would arise from the sale of her jewellery—for his own ventures and expenses.

Lammle had certainly aided him in disposing of the gold and precious stones at a good valuation; but in return for his services had insisted on the payment of a hundred pounds to himself by way of commission

and cost of travelling, and the contribution by Veneering of another five hundred pounds to a fund which the Lammles were setting aside for a flutter at Badden-Baden and a further venture which might lead them to Paris. The actual cash, therefore, which Veneering had realised by the sale of his wife's adornments did not come to much more than £7,000. This amount, invested in French securities, would bring in about £300 a year.

The weather after Christmas became as bitterly cold as it can be in north-east France. And the Flemish stoves, burning charcoal or wood, did not warm—they thought—like a good English coal-fire in an open grate. The English chaplain called on them, after having seen Mrs. Veneering once or twice at church, and suggested a subscription to St. Michael's building fund, which Veneering gave—rather reluctantly. The Veneerings tried to convey, with vague statements, the idea that they had taken refuge on the French side of the Channel for health rather than for financial reasons, and also for the future education of their children. "It is so important, don't you think, Mr. —Mr.—Diver, that these dear little souls should acquire French when they are quite young?" said Anastasia, coming to her husband's support. "I am sure dear Papa spared no expense on *my* education, and I went to a very expensive school at Blackheath; but although I mastered French grammar and all those irregular verbs, and could write quite a good letter in French before I left school, I haven't yet got into the way of *speaking* it or understanding *easily* what the common people say. I'm sure the *trouble* I have with my servants here——!"

But the Revd. Mr. Diver, having got his subscription, was cold and non-committal, and probably knew all about the Veneerings and the Lammles. Mrs. Diver had excused herself from accompanying her

husband on the plea of a cold, and never repaired the omission or recognised Mrs. Veneering at any of the local fêtes. On the other hand, the Catholic priest of the local French church soon got into conversation with them out of doors, and came to see them uninvited, attracted by the faces of their children. Mrs. Veneering instinctively turned to him for counsel and sympathy. He spoke English with a strong Irish accent, being partly of Irish descent, and having once been resident in Ireland on some religious business connected with the Irish Catholic students at Louvain and Arras.

In January, the expectea baby was born—a boy. Mrs. Veneering, who had been reading Tennyson's *Idylls of the King,* to wile away home-sickness—for she had occasional regrets for the Brompton establishment, with its butler and footman, its professed cook, obsequious maids, its carriage and pair and substantial meals, and sensation of being in the middle of everything that was going on—named the newcomer "Lancelot," hoping he would grow up a knightly character who would fight his mother's battles and lift his parents back into respectability.

In the following March her husband was getting restless and bored, and did not seem overjoyed at an addition to his family. He decided to go off with the Lammles to the newly-established gambling-rooms at a bathing resort on the outskirts of Monaco—Monte Carlo, it had just been called. The season was a little early for Baden-Baden or Homburg, and Alfred Lammle wanted to try his hand at pigeon shooting, besides fancying they might meet, in the metaphorical sense, pigeons to be plucked in this unsophisticated little principality.

So Anastasia was alone, except for her children, one sunny morning in April, when the *bonne-à-tout-*

faire came out into the untidy garden to say there was a "monsieur anglais dans le salon, *très* comme il faut et qui sait parler français." "Il m'a passé sa carte en demandant des nouvelles de Monsieur. Je lui ai dit que Monsieur était en voyage pour les affaires, mais que Madame——" "It's Mr. Harmon!" exclaimed Anastasia. "Well, I never. Oh, *what* shall I do, in this shabby old morning gown?"

As there was no one present who could understand the purport of these remarks, she might have lost further time in perplexity, had not John Harmon very sensibly followed the French servant out into the garden and advanced to the little group.

"Please excuse me," he said, "for calling at such an unorthodox hour, but I crossed from Dover in the night, and thought I might find Mr. Veneering at home at this time of the day. I wanted a little conversation with him about his Mincing Lane business. Your servant, however, says he is away from home, on a journey——"

"Oh yes, he is—with some friends of ours—the Lammles—oh, dear!—I feel quite—quite—I mean, hardly myself at the sight of your name—I don't think you ever dined with us in the happy old days, when you—er—lived with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin? . . . But we had the pleasure several times of entertaining *Mrs.* Harmon when she was Miss Wilfer. . . . Won't you stay a little while and give us news of our friends in England? We will go into the house—I am afraid my drawing-room is rather dusty . . . it is *so* difficult, with only one servant. There, baby . . . mustn't cry . . . I'm afraid he will disturb us, but I daren't leave him, and, although the other two children are as good as gold, they are too young to look after him, and Julie at this moment is attending to what she calls breakfast, though it is really our lunch. May I ask

you to stay and share it with us? No? Then a glass of wine and a biscuit?"

Out of civility, John Harmon accepted, explaining that he must presently return to the railway station to continue an interrupted journey to Brussels and Ghent.

"I got your address from the Mincing Lane house. It still carries on business; largely with the help of my father-in-law, Wilfer; for your husband's partner, Mr. Stobbles, though very good in some ways—about the properties of drugs, I mean—is not a good man of affairs. What I chiefly came to say to Mr. Veneering was this: I should like him to give me a statement as to his liabilities and assets—could you write the exact words down? I can hold baby while you do so. . . . Oh, I am quite a family man . . . got a little girl, now, of my own—*his liabilities and assets and any ideas he might have* as to the future of the drug business. If he would repose this amount of confidence in me, I might—it is just possible I *might*—be able to set him on his feet again, at any rate, arrive at some understanding with his creditors which would enable him to return to England without fear of any proceedings. Have you got that noted down? Then here's baby back again, none the worse for the transfer."

"Indeed, it is wonderful," exclaimed the grateful Anastasia. "He usually cries if I give him up to any one, even Julie. . . . I am to give this message to my husband? But I don't know when I shall see him. . . . He's gone off with the Lammles to the South of France, to some new bathing resort——"

"Indeed! That's bad. From all I have heard I should very much distrust the Lammles, at any rate, the husband. He came to grief the year before last by speculating. . . . Let me see; they were married

from your house, weren't they? Bella used to give a very amusing account of them, though she never could forgive the wife for writing a ridiculous letter about *me* to Mr. Boffin! However, as that helped to bring us together *I* forgave Mrs. Lammle. It was more the husband I objected to——"

"I don't think it is poor *Mr.* Lammle who is so much to blame," said Anastasia; "it is Sophie Lammle I am beginning to distrust. Yes, they met for the first time at our house. Hamilton had known Sophie's father at Harrogate, and when the father died he wanted to be kind to the daughter, so I asked her to come and stay and see something of the London season. . . . And so she met Alfred, and they were married. But you have *no* idea what a *change* has come over them since they came to France. They seem *much* more prosperous—in fact, they've got very nice rooms in the town, furnished with *great* taste, and Mr. Lammle is looked upon as *quite* an authority on sport. But Sophie—she objects now to be called Sophronia—has become *so* masterful—she is quite different to the Sophronia Akershem I first asked to stay five years ago. . . . She and Alfred have got up some wonderful scheme for making money—it is too complicated for me to understand, and it seems that Hamilton is mixed up in it. I am sure he would not connect himself with anything that wasn't quite honourable. He does so want, poor fellow!—to get rich somehow, and pay all he owes, and once more settle down in London."

"Well, all the same, you can tell him from me he had much better stick to the old drug business and compound with his creditors. You know my address in Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square? You used to call there on the Boffins every now and again." (Mrs. Veneering sighed theatrically.) "Well, when your husband returns, ask him to write to me frankly about

his affairs, and I will see how far I can help him. I particularly want to know about those plantations of cinchona in Mysore. You'll remember the word, 'cinchona?'—quinine, don't you know. . . . Hullo! Is this the rest of the family?"

Joanna and Melvin, unable any longer to resist their curiosity as to the gentleman visitor, who spoke English, but who was not Papa, had pushed open the door of the *salon* and stood silently regarding John Harmon. They were both rather grubby as to hands and face, because they had been "helping" the gardener, and their pinafores were dirty, and their noses, with some spring catarrh, badly wanted wiping. But they had attractive faces, and John Harmon, who had a tender heart and a rare sympathy with neglected children, smiled at them and produced from his pocket a five-franc piece . . . which he duly presented to Joanna, saying it was to buy sweetmeats for herself and her brother.

"Yes," said Mrs. Veneering, overflowing with thanks and dropping a tear or two. "This is Joanna, though we call her Jeanne now; I think it sounds prettier . . . in French. She was named after a once dear friend of ours, her godfather, Mr. John Podsnap—I'm afraid the Podsnaps think very badly of us now! If you ever meet him."—(Harmon ejaculated: "Not *I!* Can't bear the pompous ass.")—"you might explain how *resolved* poor Hamilton is to make everything right. And this is little Melvin—two and a half years old. He was named after another of our friends—I think you know him? Mr. Twemlow. . . . And, now darlings, you should thank this kind gentleman——"

"Oh, never mind that," said Harmon. "And what is more, I had better go out and see my *cocher* has not lost patience and driven away; if so, I shall lose my train to Brussels, where I stop to-night——"

John Harmon—at this time about thirty-four years of age—was a man of sound business instincts and yet of great kindness of heart. He had had a rather unhappy boyhood, much of which had been spent at school in Brussels. Or, rather, his schooldays had been happy; it was his episodes of life with his father in a dreary part of London near Camden Town, now covered with depôts of the Midland and Great Northern Railways, which had given such an intense melancholy to his early life and led to his running away to sea and eventually drifting to Cape Colony. Here in early manhood he had soon made good. A kindly Dutch colonist had taken him on as an assistant on a vine-growing estate. During his school life in Brussels he had learnt not only French, but also Flemish, and this enabled him very soon to speak fluently the Taal of Dutch South Africa and to transact business profitably with the Dutch settlers.

Then his father had died, and he had, after a year or two's mystification, which he had carried out for quixotic purposes, come into a large fortune—rumour said, when all was realised, about £200,000—and had married at the same time a charming woman. The melancholy of his boyhood had passed through several years of happiness into a deep sympathy with misfortune wherever it was to be found, and he had specially devoted himself to redressing wrongs and establishing rights in the circle of friends and acquaintances with whom he had come into contact, through his courtship of his wife and his happy marriage.

For he had no traceable relations of his own, or none who brought themselves to his knowledge. His mother had been a governess in a Highgate family. In her walks with her pupils about the fields of Holloway she had attracted the attention of John Harmon's father, a man of middle age, hitherto so preoccupied with acquiring wealth that he had no time to think

about marriage. But he now wanted heirs to the fortune he was building up; this meek-looking governess should prove a submissive wife. He proposed to her abruptly, following on a slight acquaintance; and after refusing him once (for which he made her pay dearly in her married life), she accepted him as an alternative to drudgery and semi-starvation.

In later years, on his return from Africa, John Harmon found, by consulting the marriage register at the Camden Town church, that his mother's maiden name had been Stansfield, and the status of her father that of "an officer in His Majesty's Army." Only that much he knew, for his irascible and hard-natured father, when his mother was dead, had destroyed her letters and such relics of her family as she might have preserved.

His father's father had seemingly been a carrier or carter at Tewkesbury, who, after making many journeys on the road between Gloucester and London, became entangled in London with canal construction as a navvy or a carter. His son—John Harmon's father—inherited the fine physique and good looks of the Gloucestershire peasant, but had somehow absorbed flint and sand and clinkers into his constitution. He grew up close-fisted, opinionated, and a hard bargainer. But he founded a lucrative business as a contractor for the removal of dust, soil from the railway cuttings, rubbish, and refuse which he incinerated for manure. He had acquired for two or three thousand pounds waste lands—ruined market gardens, bankrupt brickfields—in the blighted regions between the Euston Road, Camden Town, and Holloway. This land, at the time of his death, had become of immense potential value for building purposes and railway sidings.

In the middle of the waste ground where the father dumped his dust in huge mounds was the shell of an old Elizabethan country house which, by means of

some ugly and incongruous repairs, had been made habitable. At any rate, it was the home to which the poor young wife was brought, and the place where John Harmon and his sister were born. In the neighbourhood it was known as "Harmony Jail," partly out of irony for the absence of harmony in Mr. Harmon's relations with his unhappy wife—of whom he was almost crazily jealous—and partly because it suggested truly enough in its appearance and setting the sequestered life led by Mrs. Harmon, till an early death released her from a tyrannical husband.

John Harmon's thoughts, after he left Mrs. Veneering at Villa les Acacias, were ranging over this period of his youth—the dreary home at Battle Bridge and the presence there of a father whom he hated and feared—and he continued to dwell on this subject till his arrival in Ghent, where he was to visit a great drug manufactory and some botanical gardens indirectly connected with the drug business. One of the few reasonable things his father had done after his mother's death, was to send him to a school on the outskirts of Brussels where he would be well grounded in French and German and be inducted into chemistry and other practical sciences. And he wanted to revisit the precincts of this school—not necessarily to make himself known to any who might remember him —*that* might lead to boring conversations and effusive congratulations—but just to greet the ghost of his dead self of twenty years ago, a studious boy who hungered for affection and found it not, and who yet resolved that if ever he made his way in the world and became a rich man, his greatest pleasure should lie in making other people happy—because he had been so unhappy himself.

It was here, at this school, that he had heard of his sister's death, not long after her runaway marriage.

It was a blustering day in March, 1845. The news had come from her young husband. He remembered how he had gone impulsively, shaken with sobs, to the master he liked best, had said he *must* return home owing to a bereavement, how his saved and accumulated pocket money only amounted to about fourteen francs, and the cost of a ticket to London was therefore beyond him; how the master, after a conference with the principal, had somehow raised the necessary forty francs—had he ever repaid him? He feared not; and probably his angry father had repudiated the debt; since, when he did reach home and reproached the cruel old man for being the cause of his sister's death, he was flung into the street and told to go to the Devil by the quickest route. . . . And had, indeed, stumbled half blindly towards the Thames with thoughts either of drowning himself or of taking any berth he could get—cabin boy, under steward, deck hand—which might remove him from horrible London and a half-insane parent. And then, wonderful strokes of good fortune that had followed and filled up the succeeding fourteen years before he came into his inheritance and found himself a very rich man.

But when, after several blunders in direction—for Brussels had altered much in twenty years—he found himself where the old school buildings had stood, lo! there was a brewery in their place. So there was no master to be sought out and repaid—with interest, for the school funds—that matter of forty francs. Therefore, he turned back—perhaps a little relieved at being absolved from explanations and autobiography; and having written a few lines to Bella, and changed his dress for an early dinner, he had gone to the Théatre de la Monnaie to see Offenbach's light opera, *La Belle Hélène,* over which he laughed heartily, though the rapidly sung and spoken French was only partially comprehensible. Twenty years' absence on the high

seas, in South Africa, and latterly in England, had played havoc with his French; but his expertness in the Dutch of South Africa enabled him to understand and speak Flemish to a degree that astonished the Belgians, and certainly obtained for him information at Ghent, at Leyden, and Amsterdam, from Dutch and Flemish botanists, chemists, and drug manufacturers which no single-languaged Englishman would have received.

There was forming in his mind the resolve to take up Veneering's firm and push it to far greater developments in the discovery and preparation of new drugs than any of its partners had conceived. Not only might he thus render great services to humanity in combating disease; but with mankind's passion for trying remedies to combat its ills of the flesh and mind, a great drug business should be—as Veneering himself had thought before he deteriorated—the certain road to wealth.

The income he derived from his invested fortune brought him over £7,000 a year. But this would go only a small way in the benevolences, subsidies, and salves for unhappiness he purposed providing. If he was to disseminate happiness on a large scale he could not be too wealthy; and there was no more praiseworthy career for acquiring riches than that of the drug merchant.

CHAPTER III

SOPHRONIA'S FRANKNESS

ON the day when John Harmon was paying his call on Anastasia Veneering at the Calais Villa, Mr. and Mrs. Lammle were walking back in a leisurely manner from Nice to Condamine, where they had their abode in an old-fashioned hotel, the whole they gambled and sported at Monte Carlo. Hamilton Veneering had been told by Sophronia that he was not to accompany them; he had better try his luck at trente-et-quarante. So in the morning they had gone in by train to Nice, had paid money into their separate accounts at the bank, and Sophronia had made a mysterious visit to the Préfecture de Police with her veil down. Alfred had bought some cigars and an English newspaper dealing with finance; then they had lunched deliciously at a restaurant, and finally had given ten francs to the driver of an open carriage to take them beyond the houses of Nice and its suburbs and put them down on the coast road to Monaco at Beaulieu.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Lammle had felt the time had come for another clearing up of mysteries and misunderstandings between them, and that this might be effected by returning on foot, without hurry and with an occasional rest by the way along the lower road which connects Nice with the little principality of Monaco.

"This walk must remind you," said Sophronia, "of the one we had at Shanklin, four years ago . . . on our honeymoon, you remember? When we both found each other out for the schemers and adven-

turers we were. Only the circumstances and surroundings are very different. This coast is rather superior to the Isle of Wight in scenery, I should fancy, and the cooking of the Café des Anglais is somewhat better than it was at the Shanklin hotel . . . and instead of having only fifteen or sixteen hundred pounds between us and the gutter, we have now more than twice that sum. Also, I have ceased to be afraid of you, as I was then. Also, I feel almost re-born, a different woman, *far* more sure of myself. . . ."

She looked what she said. Though the fashions of the day for women were hideous in shape and outline and usually garish in colour, she was well-dressed and not without a certain individuality of taste. Well dressed, neatly booted for a dusty walk, her crinoline supporting skirts swung well above the road level. She wore a boat-shaped hat of amber-tinted Leghorn straw with a graceful ostrich plume of dove colour; a dove-coloured veil shielded her well-made-up complexion from the glare of the sunlight and made it look a natural pink and white; her parasol was of dove-coloured silk; her poplin dress, of the same Quaker tint, was looped up with gilt cords over a pleated, stiff, white underskirt, and the belt round her waist was of gilt braid. Her kid gloves were fawn colour. No one would have guessed her to be forty-three years old. She needed no dye to keep her black hair black, no stimulant to make her fine eyes glow and sparkle. Her gorgon aunt would scarcely have recognised in the Sophronia of April, 1865, the sallow, thin, gloomily-frowning spinster who had dawdled about the water temples of Harrogate for twenty years in vain hope of adventure, of wider horizons, and release from genteel poverty and stifling conventionality.

Her husband at first walked by her side smoking a big Londrès cigar and flicking the spring flowers with his cane. A few minutes of silence followed her open-

ing remarks. Then he said with a certain angry bluster:

"You may have ceased to be afraid of me—you talk, by the bye, as though I were a possible assassin . . . we have been married now nearly four years. I don't think during all that time I have once raised my hand . . . or foot . . . against you, though I have sometimes been sorely tempted to do so. But I have had a better control over my temper than you . . . and I am going to try to keep that command of myself, though I should not advise you to try me too far. . . . You are unfaithful to me with that plausible humbug, Veneering. If I really cared about you I would have shot him after I saw him coming out of your room at the hotel the other morning at 3 a.m., but——"

"But you were probably too tipsy to aim straight, and as to three a.m., you had most likely been indulging in some low amour of your own to be returning at that hour."

"Not *I!* Gambling and love-making don't go together. I'd been playing écarté at Douglas Williams's rooms and had rooked him pretty well. . . . But, look here, I'm not going to be made a laughing-stock before these damned foreigners—what they call over here 'Cockoo.'"

"Heavens! What an accent! I suppose you mean 'cocu'? Here, if you don't mind, I'll walk on the other side of you, to the left; otherwise, skirting this precipice might prove too strong a temptation to you, though I cannot see what you would gain by my death or the breaking of our partnership. *I* don't interfere with *your* personal liberty: don't you interfere with mine. I only advise from time to time about what people are saying, because I don't want you to get into trouble, and you are sometimes very reckless, in your own way. . . . I suppose you would say *that* is all you are doing by me? In such case, I take it in good

part. *I* don't want to compromise myself with Hamilton. I may as well tell you, however, to explain things, that there was an intimacy between us for some weeks, years ago at Harrogate, before he married Annie Veneering. After he had married her he wanted to live respectably, and so, when I turned up again, he pushed me into your arms. . . . 'Mais l'on revient toujours à ses premiers amours . . . !'"

"I guessed as much . . . on our honeymoon."

"Well, and what was our compact then? That somehow we would pay Veneering back. And we're doing so. The seven thousand pounds he realised out of Annie's jewellery has become a sort of capital for us to draw on in our schemes. He has fallen in love with me again, in a stupid, middle-aged way—shows how life abroad has improved my appearance! . . . There's no doubt I look ten years younger than when I married you—and he can deny me nothing. After all, Annie has her four hundred a year and her children, and is as happy as she deserves to be. I don't see why we shouldn't drain Hamilton dry before we send him back to her. . . . But it really seems as though we had the devil's own luck since we crossed the Channel. So far, most of our ventures have been successful, and we haven't got the wrong side of the law. . . . Here's a seat and a most lovely view! This is a bit better than Sackville Street and the Green Park or the Royal Botanic Gardens on a Sunday! And a thousand times better than Yorkshire! Do you know, there are moments when I almost forgive you for marrying me under false pretences, since it has led to this kind of life? We shall probably end in tolerating one another. I dislike you far less than I did during the first year of our marriage; because I see less of you; and so long as you don't waste money and aren't imprudent you won't find me jealous. But you still drink too much wine . . . liqueurs . . . ab-

sinthe . . . brandy. It is not adding to your beauty . . . it swells your nose, and even produces a pimple or two. . . ."

"Stop that; if we're going to be personal I could say a nasty thing or two about *your* appearance . . . *you're* getting stout . . . you eat too much. . . . Still, it is waste of time, quarrelling; only, if we're to live side by side and co-operate, we ought to have no secrets from one another. . . . What were you doing at the Préfecchoor der Police? . . ."

"The Préfecture? I thought you would soon want to know, and I had every intention of telling you. That was why I proposed this day out and this walk back. . . . Ahem! What do you think your Sophronia has become, Monsieur mon Mari? An agent of the French Secret Service. But as what I am going to tell you is very confidential, let's get up and walk on. Somebody might be lurking near this seat who understood English. . . . You never know. . . . Well, you remember when we were at Baden-Baden in the autumn, you wondered *why* I thought it worth while to make up to that Prussian officer, who was so proud of talking English? He certainly was a drunken beast, but he let out some funny things about the new Prussian rifle and some preparations the Prussians were making, after the war, with Denmark. Then that Frenchman, with the waxed moustaches that looked so like the Emperor Napoleon. . . . Sh! to both of us. There's that Englishwoman who lives at Beaulieu coming towards us . . . Miss Spranklin . . . I've often wondered who she is . . . a spy of kinds, I expect. . . . She's always turning up when least expected. . . . Oh, *how* do you do! Isn't it *glorious* weather, and *not* oppressively hot. Alfred and I have been to Nice, and what do you think? We're walking home, to Condamine! Taking it easy, of course. French people would say, '*what* an Eng-

lish thing to do,' wouldn't they? But I've always loved walking, more, I think, than Alfred does. He's been more used to riding—in America—and all the other strange places he has been to, but I, when I was a girl in Yorkshire. . . . You know Yorkshire? . . . Well, we mustn't keep you, and if we're to get back in time to dress for dinner. . . . See, Alfred! There's an empty carriage coming up just behind us. He's probably returning to Monaco, and I dare say would take us there for a trifle. . . ." (Alfred goes to stop the man.) "Am I doing anything for the church bazaar? D'you know, I'm shocked to say we've been a whole month in Condamine and I didn't know we *had* a church there. I thought the clergyman we met at the Casino was—er—well, only made up to *look* like a clergyman. . . . You do meet such *odd* people abroad, don't you. How much? Five francs? Well, for that he must take us to our very door. . . . *Good*-bye."

(They got into the carriage.) "I could have well walked the rest of the way, but there seemed to be no other means of shaking her off. I don't suppose the *cocher* understands one word of English, and I needn't raise my voice, nor you yours.

"Well, as I was saying, that Frenchman with the waxed moustaches that we used to see at Baden-Baden is really high up in their Secret Service, their Political Police, or whatever they call it. He and I got very friendly, as you know; in fact, you began to be disagreeable about him. But *I* knew what I was about. I told him some of the things the Prussian had told me, and he was much interested. He gave me five hundred francs to meet expenses and an address in Paris to write to——"

Alfred: "Yes! And I had to pay for Pillnitz's wines and cigars. If I'd known the game you were up to——"

Sophronia: "You would probably have spoilt it by over civility, or by some blundering bluster. If *you* paid out of our common fund for entertaining him, *I* paid out of my annuity for the alluring dresses I wore . . . and the hats . . . and bonnets——"

Alfred: "That type would have probably been more 'allured,' as you call it, if you'd worn nothing at all in those private interviews you used to have. . . . Haw! Haw! For I must say you've got a spanking figure, and don't look your age——"

Sophronia: "Alfred! You are a coarse beast. Where did you come from? The veneer of civilisation is very thin——"

Alfred: "I suppose that's why you prefer 'Veneering.' . . . Haw! Haw!"

Sophronia: "Have you been drinking? No. I suppose you can't help these stable manners. But we have no time for altercations if I am to tell you as much as you need to know before we get back to the hotel. The business at Baden-Baden ended in my getting some valuable information for the French Government about the way things were going in Germany —I mean, between Prussia and Austria and the smaller states. You may have noticed the authorities at Calais were very complaisant to me when we returned. Then we went to Paris last February, and I was given instructions as to work I might do in this direction; never mind for the present *what* work and with *whom*. It is enough to say that Monaco *and* the Casino make a very good centre. After what I was told to-day at the Préfecture de Police I have come to the conclusion we might get rid of our Calais apartment, as we shan't be going in that direction for I don't know when. We could store some of our things and bring the rest down here. No. I should say store *all* of them, as I expect we shall lead rather a wandering life for the next year or two. You know the year

after next they're going to have a Great Exhibition at Paris, and I am told I may be required for special service there——"

Alfred: "And how much are you going to get for this? For I suppose while you are playing this game you'll have to forswear risky enterprises?"

Sophronia: "In a way, yes; but that needn't prevent you from trying *your* luck, provided you keep from doing anything fraudulent. I may even be able to put some well-paid work in your way. As to myself, I shan't tell you what I am going to get . . . and what is more, I shall be paid pretty much by results. The people I deal with pay well, but they keep their eyes skinned, as the Americans say. However, I think it will turn out to be a better speculation than gambling and card-playing and jobs that verge on blackmail. We shall be under the protection of the authorities, which is a comforting thing in the silent watches of the night."

Alfred: "And Veneering?"

Sophronia: "Oh, Veneering. . . . Well . . . he has served his purpose, and is getting inconveniently fond of me and a little jealous. He might end by being in the way. You could win a little more money off him at cards, and then we'll return him to Anastasia, and she can keep him. Now we're back in Monaco."

(The carriage stops at the custom's barrier.) "Rien à déclarer; nous revenons de Nice——"

"I'll try to endure you, at any rate for a few years longer, provided you don't get in my way, don't take to drinking absinthe—or too much of it—don't cheat at cards, or get found out in anything really discreditable; and *never* ask me where I am going, what I am doing, or whom it was I spoke to. At the same time, if *you* fancy an independent line of your own, or that you'd like to live with some other woman, *I* shan't

stand in your way. I only once baulked your schemes, and that was over Georgiana Podsnap——"

Alfred: "I *thought* you did; though *why* you did it seemed incomprehensible——"

Sophronia: "I dare say. You wouldn't understand . . . if I told you. We all have our weaknesses. . . . But as against that, I wrung a hundred pounds out of old Boffin, and without that we should have been hard put to it to start life again at Calais. Our misfortunes turned out blessings in the long run. Even our marriage, which four years ago seemed the most dreary blunder we had either of us perpetrated, has really brought us good luck, in a way. All I regret *now* is that I wasted twenty years of my life in England, when I might have spent them to *far* better advantage in France. However, I'm going to make up for lost time now. Here we are at the hotel. Pay the man; I haven't got change. Ah! Hamilton! We've had such a *pleasant* day at Nice. But *you* look glum!——"

Veneering: "I had the deuce's own luck at trente-et-quarante. Five times in an hour did 'refait' * turn up. There were several things about the declarations I couldn't understand, and you weren't there to explain. My stakes were swept away and no explanations were given—I shall go back to roulette——"

Sophronia: "You'd much better go back to Annie and Calais. But we'll talk about that, and much more, after dinner. Alfred shall teach us this new card game, 'Napoleon.' There's a young Italian officer here who is dying to learn it, and Count Markovski is coming, and the Hungarian whose name I never can remember, who is such a swell at the pigeon-shooting. . . . I think, as I say, you had better go back to Calais and see how Annie is getting on; and . . . yes, this is an idea. You could wind up our affairs at Calais, get rid of our rooms—don't scowl! We've done a lot

* "Thirty-one"—a "tie."

for you and your wife—pay off our servants, and store our furniture in your villa—there's plenty of room there—in fact, you could well set aside a couple of rooms for us to occupy if we had to return to Calais at any time. . . . I'll talk over all that with you to-morrow, or else we shall be late for dinner——"

The next morning brought Hamilton Veneering a plaintive letter from his Anastasia, asking why he remained so long away. It was no longer cold at Calais; spring-time was beginning to make the surrounding country beautiful with pear and plum blossom, and the children already asked her several times a day when Papa was coming back. Baby was delicate and a cause of anxiety over the premonitory symptoms of teething. The local French doctor was kind; as was Père Duparquet, the curé. . . . As to the Revd. Eustace Diver and Mrs. Diver, they ignored her when she met them in Calais Town; though, owing to baby, she very seldom got out for a walk. Of all people in the world who had called to inquire after them was "that Mr. Harmon," whose appearance and disappearance five years ago . . . "The Man from Somewhere" . . . had been the staple of conversation at their first dinner parties, after they settled in Brompton. And he had sent Hamilton *particularly* the following message (here she retailed it), and had said much else that had better be reserved for face-to-face conversation. She gave her love to Sophie, and her regards to Mr. Lammle; but if Hamilton did not return soon she would be very unhappy.

To this letter her husband replied that important business (besides a regard for his health, impaired by their recent vicissitudes) still kept him in the new department of the Alpes Maritimes, but that he would be back at Calais shortly, though not for long even then, as he could not afford to settle down to an idle life, now that there were three children to support.

To Harmon he wrote civilly, expressing himself both interested and grateful in noting that gentleman's intervention in the affairs of his firm. He would give him all the information he required. His liabilities were such and such, chiefly in connection with Stock Exchange speculations which *ought* to have turned out brilliantly, but for the unexpected victory of the Northern States over the Southern in the American Civil War. As to the Mysore cinchona plantations, on which he had dropped a matter of seven or eight thousand pounds, only a small proportion of the loss fell on the Mincing Lane business. But the particulars about these cinchona plantations were as follows (then came a page of technical details): More capital, the visit of a shrewd, capable man—he himself was too old, too ailing in health to travel so far—a good rainy season next monsoon; and the cinchona planting venture would turn out a great financial success and would place Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles no longer at the mercy of the Peruvian and Dutch control of the market. Mr. Harmon could discuss all these things with Mortimer Lightwood, who was solicitor to them both. . . . Also with George Stobbles, the remaining director, or any other adviser—old Wilfer if he choose. He could then appraise in a round sum the money value of Veneering's interest (which included that of Mrs. Veneering as the heiress of old Chicksey) in the Mincing Lane firm and buy him out, become himself the predominant partner. When this transaction was completed Mr. Veneering proposed applying some of the money, through Lightwood, towards liquidating the more pressing of his outstanding debts in London.

As to himself, even if a composition could be arrived at with his creditors, he renounced any idea of further interest in the affairs of the drug market. He was sick of life in London or anywhere in England, or

of legislation for an ungrateful country at Westminster. He had, therefore, no desire to return to his old friends and haunts, but would devote any small capital he could save from the wreck of his fortunes to building up a business in the more sympathetic land of France. Thus he might make some provision for his wife and children—now three in number—and eventually arrive at a settlement of his debts.

* * * * *

A few days after writing in this strain he was back at Villa les Acacias. But ready to find fault with everything—with the musty smell of the house, the still rather untidy garden which, though it produced a great variety of vegetables, and had much promise of fruit, had nothing in the way of flower displays to compare with the glowing *parterres* of the Riviera. He gave no praise to the lilac bushes, heavy with blossom, nor to the syringa or laburnum, or the delicate white-petalled flowers of the false acacia (the *Robinia* which gave its name to the villa).

The cooking seemed to him atrocious and the fare very plain after the delicious and varied repasts of the southern hotels. The children played noisily, and bored him with their clamour that he should join in their games; then sobbed at his rough refusals. The new baby incessantly squalled and whimpered with its rashes and skin troubles, its inflamed gums and its tiny stomach aches. Its mother, to economise and to avoid complications, was nursing it herself, and could not leave it therefore in the day-time and was constantly waking at night to attend to its wants; thus disturbing her husband's rest. The villa was at a distance of nearly three miles from the social haunts and pleasures of Calais Town, and in those days was without any tram or omnibus service. You could drive *out* from Calais to the villa without very great expense; but it was difficult to obtain a carriage for driving *to* the

town without specially ordering it. The amount of gambling permitted at the Casino or Club was pitifully small for one now accustomed to high stakes and a bold play; and at the Casino he suspected the Direction of cheating audaciously to stop any run of luck on the part of those patrons who were English and found it difficult to utter protests in an intelligible way.

A month of home life made him feel that he must get away at all costs. He wrote to Sophronia saying so. She replied that it was out of the question rejoining *her,* as she was engaged on business of her own and would find him very much in the way; but that Alfred was returning to Baden-Baden and would, no doubt, value his companionship. So to Baden-Baden Hamilton went, determining to brave the fortune of the tables in a very resolute manner, back his luck with all the capital he could command, eat and drink of the best, enjoy life ferociously, and make up for his abandonment of his wife and children by sending Anastasia occasional sums of money out of his winnings.

CHAPTER IV

"ALL KIND FRIENDS AND RELATIONS"

MELVIN VENEERING, when he grew to manhood and wrote his name Mervyn (to make it more normal), used to remember, with an ironical smile, a sentence from his childish prayers, learnt by rote and imperfectly understood: "Dod bless all tind flends and delations."

Mrs. Veneering had been taught her prayers by her nurse in William IV.'s short reign, and amongst other sentences had learnt this conventional pleading with the Creator for her friends and kinsfolk, though as to the latter she had very few—only a grim Aunt Agatha and an apoplectic Uncle Tollemache and two odious, pasty-faced cousins. When she had, in her turn, to teach her children a form of prayers, associated in their minds with cold and naked feet and the tiresome toilet processes of getting up and going to bed, she introduced the same sentence, the more perfunctory in their case, since they knew of no relations and had scarcely a friend. In after life Mervyn was more inclined to think of relations as incumbrances to be adjusted than as objects on whom to call down blessings, and he used to wonder how John Harmon—his greatest friend—could show such patience and active kindness towards his wife's connections: especially when he was so fortunate himself as to be free from any known relations.

John and Bella had married very quietly—almost as a romantic escapade—in May, 1863, and they had passed more than a year of their married life in coun-

try seclusion on the Kentish outskirts of London. But not long after he had taken over his inheritance, and set up a rich man's establishment in a house near the corner of Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square, the overlooked relations of his wife began to appear in the offing to Bella's great disgust. Most of them had grown quite unfamiliar to her because her parents, in their needy circumstances, had been shunned by brothers and sisters, and in-laws of all kinds, as well as deserted by their elder children—John, Susan, Reginald, and Cecilia.

Mrs. Wilfer, their mother, was always in a tiff or a sulk or a mood of abstraction. One wondered how she had ever become a wife and a mother except in a gloomy trance. She had never appealed to their affections, never acted as counsellor or confidante, and as they grew up to form their own opinions, she was simply a bore to be avoided.

Their father, Reginald Wilfer, they never understood—all except Bella, who was devoted to him—and he had easily reconciled himself to their departure from the overcrowded, dreary, suburban home. Occasionally they called on him in the City, when at their wits' end, to borrow money or to be bought out of a scrape; and he had placidly told them he had not a penny to spare from the upkeep of the little house at Holloway, where he lived with his wife and his two younger daughters. When they announced that, as a consequence of their despair at not being helped out of a hole or over a stile, they might commit suicide or emigrate to the colonies, he would say: "Well, my dear boy (or girl), if you feel *that* is the only solution of your difficult position, I must not gainsay you or stand in your way. . . . You mustn't consider me——"

Reginald Wilfer, Mrs. John Harmon's father, was a cherubic little person barely five feet six inches in

height, who at the age of twenty-six had been married by a gaunt young lady four years younger, Miss Arabella Medlicott. He had fancied himself an admirer of her tragic beauty, but had really been hypnotised by her glare, and had proposed to her when she gave way to hysteria after being insulted by a showman at Barnet Fair. Old Medlicott, her father, a terrifying, white-whiskered home tyrant, was a retired captain of the Mercantile Marine who lived at Finchley and was greatly interested in maps and charts, many of which he had helped to fill up by his surveys and soundings. He had invested a part of his savings in a map-making business in London, and also worked for the Admiralty.

In the first twelve years of marriage Mrs. Wilfer had produced eight children, two of whom had died. John, the eldest, after several vicissitudes as a city clerk, had emigrated to New Zealand. His father, having with difficulty got him out of one or two monetary muddles, hoped fervently he would never return—unless he made a fortune. Susan—over Susan there hung a dark cloud. She was seldom or never mentioned in the family circle and was charitably assumed to have gone on the stage. Reginald, junior, had drifted to the race-courses and become a bookmaker's clerk.

Cecilia was the plainest of a family, which otherwise, by some curious genetic result of the union of round, tubby, fluffy, blond, and blue-eyed Mr. Wilfer with gaunt, cavernous-eyed, dark-haired, and big-nosed Mrs. Wilfer was remarkable for good looks. And she—Cecilia—more to spite her family than to please herself—had married an objectionable young apothecary who was a Christadelphian, believed himself to be consumptive, had a large Adam's apple in his throat, and a digestion weakened by his ready access to all the panaceas for indigestion.

Following Cecilia, there came Bella (christened Arabella, after her portentous mother), whom John Harmon had married. And the youngest, living child was Lavinia (called "Lavvy" by every one but her mother). Lavvy, in the spring of 1865 was married to a Mr. George Sampson, thanks to his having been found a post in the resuscitated firm of Chicksey, Veneering, and Stobbles.

The first of this brood to remind Bella of his existence and his needs was the farthest away—John Wilfer—who had written the following letter in New Zealand about three months previously.

Auckland, N. I.,
New Zealand.
April 2, 1865.

My dear Sister,—

Mother—we, in the Colonies, dislike the Pa and Ma business, we think it too Frenchy—Mother wrote to me at Christmas and told me about your marriage to Mr. Harmon, and how he was so rich through coming into a fine property, and how he had found a berth for Father, and little Lavvy was going to marry your old flame, George Sampson. I was glad to hear this good news, family fortunes having fallen so low.

I expect you'll hardly remember me. You weren't much more than fourteen when I cut Old England and worked my passage out to New Zealand. But I often think about you, nights and lonely days. You wore your hair down your back, and were a regular spitfire if a chap teased you, but nothing to little Lavvy. I pity George Sampson (was he the auctioneer's son in the Hampstead Road?) if Lavvy's grown up like what she promised, though I dare say she's a good-looking little devil.

Well, here I am, thirty last birthday and not settled yet. Though I've got my eye on a girl here I'd like to

marry if she'd have me, and if I'd enough money saved to buy land and settle down to farm. But I've been a roving stone and gathered no moss—or very little so far.

I've been mate on a small schooner which belongs to Levy Brothers of Auckland—the *Jew's Harp,* we call her, cos of the sound of the wind in her rigging and becos the owners are Jews, though jolly good fellows. We traded with the Cannobal Islands to the north in the calm season of the year, and, mind you, one way and another, I've seen things as would fill a score of boys' books if I were only a writer. But I've just been through experiences on the east side of this North Island as bad as anything that could happen in the New Hebrides or Feejee. You probably know from the papers at home that we've been fighting the natives—what they call the Maories—for five years. The trouble began in the North Island by their turning against the missionaries. They accused them of having brought in the white man and diddled them into selling their country to the British Government. Then they got mixed up with the different kinds of Christianity that the missionaries taught. Some of the missionaries were papists, some were Wesleyans, and some Church of England. So at last the Maories said they would make up a Christian religion to suit themselves. And they did. Such a farrago of nonsense and beastliness as you've no idea, and I could not soil the paper by telling you. Its called Pai Marire, and is all about the Virgin Mary, who they've made into a goddess who can give you permission in your dreams to do any d—— thing you like, even cannobalism. Its a rum thing how quick they are to pick up things, seeing as they cant read or write and know nothing of the world outside New Zealand. They know something of the difference between Jews and Christians and although they made the Virgin Mary a goddess

they've turn downright mad against Christianity, and say its brought on all their troubles, and make out they were so happy before the white men came.

Well, there is been living in this town a missionary's family of the name of Voeglein—you pronounce it Fur-gline. He was a Church of England clergyman, spite of his German name, and he'd come out here to convert the natives. His principal station was on the bank of a small river near the coast of the Bay of Plenty. He left it some months ago to place his wife and daughters in safety at Auckland, because the Maories had all turned nasty round him owing to this war. They thought he was betraying their hiding places and plans to the Government. But after a bit he fretted and fretted at having left them, and thought if he only went back he might recover his hold over them. Plenty of people in Auckland advised him not to, but he would go. My employers have got a store at his old station—Opotiki—and he arranged with my captain, Morris Levy, to take him there, as well as another missionary who was coming as his curate.

As soon as ever our schooner, the *Jew's Harp,* got alongside the wharf at Opotiki the Maories came tumbling on board and took command, threatening to kill us every one if we made any resistance. Then they said to the captain, who can understand their lingo, "Yore a Jew; we won't kill you; it's only Christians we're after." "And he's a Jew," said one of them, pointing to me, and imagining I was the captain's younger brother. I never said anything, thinking discretion was the better part of valour, as some playwriting fellow once said. Well, they took Mr. Voeglein and the poor young curate, who spoke up very plucky, and tied his arms behind his back and shoved him into a large hut and said, "You can wait." Seeing us—the captain and me—following, their chief, a tall man with a beak-like nose, and his face hideously

tattooed, turned round angrily and said, "Alright, you shall see how we treat people who betray us." And then they set on us, and tied us up to posts placed round a big willow tree.

The captain had been so shocked when they dragged the two clergymen away from the *Jew's Harp* that he had offered them the looting of the ship, and even the store, if they would only let them go, and we would then set sail and return to Auckland. But while we were disputing there came up ten or more half-castes. They were worse devils than the Maories. They helped to tie us up, and then rushed into the church where Mr. Voeglein was being tried, and shouted in English, "Guilty, guilty, no need for more palaver." When he saw they were bent on killing him, he asked for time to say his prayers, and whilst he was praying they sent and took the block and strop and a coil of rope from our schooner and made them fast to the big willow tree, full in sight of where we were tied. There were now quite eight hundred natives and half-castes on the ground, shouting and dancing like madmen, and letting off guns. Presently poor Voeglein was dragged up under the tree and cast his eyes on us. We wriggled to free ourselves, and some of the natives rushed at us with clubs. But Voeglein called out in the native language that there was to be no more bloodshed. Next they stripped him roughly of all his clothes, even pulling off his boots, only leaving him with his flannel undershirt. The chief, Kereopa, put them on, and was wearing the missionary's watch. Whilst they were tying Voeglein's neckerchief round his eyes to blindfold him, the poor man was trying to shake hands with them. But he was soon hauled up and dangling in the air, with the natives jumping and pulling his legs to break his neck. As he seemed a long time dying they let him drop on the ground, and carried him off insensible, I think and hope. Then the

half-castes untied us and bade us go back to the ship. But we followed the crowd to see what was the end of their doings, and whether it was too late to save him. What do you think we saw? They had laid him out in the form of a cross, hacked off his head, and began drinking the blood as it poured from his neck.

Here Bella, being a Victorian true to type, could read no more for awhile without feeling faint. So she laid down the letter and applied herself to the needs of the new baby, Reginald Boffin Harmon, born six weeks before. She had been in the nursery when the letter was brought to her. But when Reginald was satisfied and had turned to sleep, she took up the letter to see how it ended. "Money, I suppose, sooner or later," she said to herself. "He would not otherwise have taken the trouble to write so long a letter ——"

There was a frightful scramble amongst the women as to who should have the most of the blood, and what dropped to the ground they painted their faces with. The chief with the tattooed face—Kereopa—then took the eyes out of the head with his fingers and ate them before the whole crowd. To set an example, he said.

"I don't wonder your Uncle John thinks he could write books for boys," she said to the unconscious Reginald Boffin, who was sleeping on her lap, with crumpled fists and very tightly closed eyelids. "I shall be sick or faint if I don't stop reading for a bit. Is that you, nurse? Yes, he's fast asleep. You might put him back in his cot, and tell Ellen she can dress Miss Hetty and bring her down to go for a drive with me. The carriage is ordered for four o'clock——"

On going up to dress for dinner after returning from a drive to Holloway—whither she went to beg

"Ma" to stop writing about her happy marriage to *any* more derelict relations—"and please, *please* never a word to the Medlicott Aunts. . . . After all, they did NOTHING for you when we were all so poor——" Bella continued the perusal of her brother's letter. She shuddered when she had to pick up the last sentences; yet she wished to read the end of the story——

After they had thrown his body to the dogs they turned on us once more, tied our hands, and imprisoned us in the house of a white settler who had run away. Next day a bigger chief than Kereopa—one called Hatara—arrived on the scene, and made them release us. How we got away to Auckland after rescuing the poor curate and taking him with us in the schooner is all told in this newspaper cutting. We also had our carte-de-visits taken in Auckland for the English papers—I send you one.

"He's very good looking," mused Bella, "but I should say rather coarsened by living among cannobals—as he calls them——"

I was told off to go and break the news to Mrs. Voeglein and her daughters. And the sight of the eldest daughter crying just set my heart aflame for love of her. She is so pretty with flaxen hair and blue eyes. But, of course, she won't listen to me while she's in morning, and, even then—what have I got to marry on? I wonder, dear Sis, if your good man, supposing he's as rich as Mother says he is, would advance me a matter of three hundred pounds by a draft on the New Zealand Banking Company, Auckland, and address the letter to me to their care? I'd swear to pay it back soon as money came to me through farming. I'd buy land, put sheep on it, build a shieling, and marry Grete—you pronounce her name like nut-

meg-grater. Meantime, I've joined the Colonial forces, to have a fair chance of shooting some of the devils who killed Grete's father——

"What are you looking so worried over, little woman?" said John Harmon, surprising her half-dressed at her dressing table. "Is it about baby?"

"Thank goodness, no. The little vampire dropped off into a sound sleep after his evening meal. It's about this letter, with your dear name at the bottom of the last sheet, only it's another John, a tiresome brother of mine who emigrated to New Zealand ages ago and now wants us to help him to get married. It's a horrible letter, all about 'Cannobals,' as he spells it. Don't read it till you've had your dinner——"

She finished dressing herself with the aid of a maid, and went down the handsomely carpeted stairs on John's arm to a richly furnished dining-room, where they enjoyed a tête-à-tête dinner, with as little assistance from men-servants as was permissible for their station in life. The "dear old Boffins," whom the previous year they had invited to share the house with them, had expressed themselves satiated with town life and Fashion, and only came up on occasional visits from the country cottage between Blackheath and Eltham, which they had taken over from the Harmons.

After dinner, Harmon read through John Wilfer's letter. The upshot was that he declared him to be a fine adventurous fellow, well worth encouragement. He should send him a draft for £300, and ask to be apprised in due time of the marriage. He would tell his brother-in-law to regard this sum not as a loan, but as a wedding present from himself and Bella. "I shall say if your brother feels he owes me any counter-service he can make inquiries about effective drugs which the Maori derive from forest or field, and send me samples for analysis. . . . In some such way I

want to start correspondents all over the new parts of the world, to find out new medicines."

"It's awfully sweet of you, John; you're *quite* the most generous man I ever heard of. But I *do* wish you'd speak of it as a *loan*. I know we're rich, but we aren't rich enough to support all my family and all the people they marry——"

"That's why I'm going to start a great medicine business out of Veneering's firm in the City. I'm convinced there's a vast fortune to be made out of drugs, and much good to be done by selling the right kind of drug. And, as to helping your family—why not them as well as any other family?"

"Darling John! You're so good and sweet, I'm almost frightened sometimes—frightened Providence will take you from me, in the spiteful way it does if any human being becomes too good, *too* lovable. Oh, how happy I ought to be! I don't deserve you. . . . Think what you've done already, since we married. Pa can hold his head up now as the chief clerk at the Mincing Lane office, and they'll soon have moved to that little house in Chelsea where Ma can be as pompous as she likes, and wear black silk dresses that will stand up of themselves, and Pa can go backwards and forwards to the City, not trudging on his poor tired little feet like he used to do, but on a river steamer. And there's George Sampson provided for, too, and you gave Lavvy a wedding present of a hundred pounds, and they're going to settle in Fulham, near Pa and Ma—I only hope Lavvy won't come here *too* often, because she rather gets on my nerves, now I'm not very strong——"

She certainly looked rather ethereal after her last confinement, thought John, as she turned her face to a profile to conceal a tear or two of gratitude and a trembling lip.

"D'you know, Bella," he said, wishing to give the

conversation a less sentimental, more practical turn, "there's no particular merit about my taste. I might just as easily have taken pleasure in doing evil. *I'm* not responsible. I s'pose it's some freak of heredity these scientific men are beginning to write about. . . . My mother's nature re-born in me, and not my father's. Or my Gloucestershire grandfather may have been a kindly man, and it's skipped one generation. . . . I can only say that as a boy I was *so* miserable, so starved for love and sympathy, that I used to vow if ever I became better off I would help all the lame dogs, all the struggling and unhappy people I came across. I believe Charles Dickens must be like that, too. They say *he* had a miserable boyhood. I met him, by the bye, at that Literary Fund dinner, where I was one of the stewards, and he actually remembered me! Think of that! Remembered our meeting at Greenwich two years ago, and how I'd told him something of my life and circumstances. . . . Well, there it is, and don't let's gush about it. Be thankful it isn't racing that's got hold of me, or gambling, like the Lammles, or a rage for asking total strangers to dinner, as the Veneerings used to do. . . . Let's go to my study."

(Lights pipe. Bella fetches some Berlin wool-work slippers on perforated canvas—a fascinating pastime which Fashion might well revive. It must have dissolved many a sorrow, following the painted pattern and searching for the right hole; and the relaxation of the mind when, having finished the intricate pink roses, you had only the solid background of Prussian blue to fill in!)

He put Bella into a small armchair; then, as the room smelt a little of burnt gas, went and threw up the window. An ideal summer evening, scarcely dark yet, and he wished they were back at the Lee Green country cottage of their honeymoon. No one ought to live in London after June. "But we'll go off to the

Isle of Wight as soon as you're strong enough to travel."

"Talking of the Veneerings," he went on, "they have been much in my mind lately. I've practically decided what to do. I'm going to buy up Stobbles's interest in the firm, change its name to Harmon, Veneering and Co., make your father a partner by-and-bye . . . put Master Reginald into the business later on. I shan't buy out Veneering altogether, because he'd only squander the money at the gaming tables or lend it to the Lammles; but I'm going to use his half-share of the profits. He's consented, of course—to pay off his debts on this side and send the other half every year to his wife to pay for her children's education——"

Bella: "Where is he now?"

John: "At Baden-Baden, probably. . . . His wife forwards his letters. . . . The Lammles seem to have separated for a time. . . . Oh, quite amiably! The intriguing Sophronia is sometimes at Paris and sometimes at Baden-Baden—I dare say with Veneering. And the villainous Alfred seems to be doing very well —member of all the best clubs—at Monaco or at this new suburb of Monaco . . . Monte something. The fair Sophronia, you know, came over here—it was during your confinement—and paid some of Alfred's more pressing debts. So Lightwood told me. I can't somehow detest that woman as much as you do. I admire her daring, her cheek. Why is it one would sooner help a sinner to repentance and respectability than a righteous man to avoid a stumble?"

Bella: "But do you *really* think the drug business *could* be made to pay?"

John: "Rather! Especially vegetable drugs. I believe in the great tropical and semi-tropical forests there are cures for all the diseases that afflict us. It only wants research and clever, patient experiments in the

laboratory. At any rate, it is the one opening that appeals to me. I used to think about it often, out in South Africa, when I watched the natives preparing their own remedies."

Bella: "I hope you will make *nice* things as well as nasty. Couldn't you find a way of making all medicines taste nice? All of them: like *pâtes de guimauve,* and rose drops, and glycerine. . . . Is glycerine vegetable?"

John: "No. I believe it is made from beef suet . . . animal fat, at any rate——"

Bella: "Ugh! Now you'll bring me back to that horrible letter of my brother John's. It'll be *ages* before I forget that detail of the cannibal chief picking out and eating the eyes"—(shudders)—"But supposing you're wrong, and this business *isn't* a success? . . . Oh, John!"—(putting down her wool-work and putting up hands of appeal)—"*Whatever* we do, *don't* let's slip back into poverty! After the last two years, I don't think I could bear to be poor . . . again."

"Don't you be distressed, my lovey darling. You shall *never* be poor again, please God! I'm going to take a leaf out of Veneering's book. I intend to settle on you, and your children afterwards, *thirty thousand pounds,* tie it up, make it yours; then, instead of giving you pin money and a dress allowance, you shall have it in the form of your own private income, with no account of how you spend it to render to any one . . . no stupid husband grumbling over millinery bills and glove-makers' bills. And then, supposing with the utmost care I *do* come to grief, *you'll* be provided for, and your precious babes. And I shall have to come to you to beg a shelter and a crust. . . . What will you say then?"

(Bella looks up at him with shining eyes and opens her arms to receive him. He stoops on one knee to the hearthrug to be embraced. And at that moment

the servant enters—as they always do—and tenders a card on a salver. John scrambles to his feet.)

Servant: "A lady to see you, ma'am."

Bella: "At *this* hour?"—(putting away her wool-work)—"Impossible! Why didn't you say, 'Not at home'?"

Servant: "Well—er—I did say so, ma'am, but it . . . wasn't . . . easy . . . to keep it up. . . . Lady was *so* insisting she must see you, and said she was a relation, and that Mrs. Wilfer had given her your address——"

(Bella takes a rather dirty, printed visiting-card and reads: "Miss Susie Wilbraham." Stares, puzzled, at her husband; then says: "*You* must help me out, John, if she's very fatiguing.")

Enter Miss Susie Wilbraham. Exit servant.

Bella looks up as John goes to meet the visitor, and sees a face and figure that are oddly reminiscent. It—it—yes, it *must* be her legendary sister, Susan, supposed to have gone on the stage some nine years ago, and never heard of since. Before that disappearance, Bella remembered stormy scenes between a very red-cheeked, sloe-eyed, rudely handsome Susan and her mother: flying sentences of defiance: "Oh *shut* up! I shall do as I like:" "How *dare* you, miss? If you stay out again I cast you off for ever!": behind closed doors. Or discussions between her father and mother, with Susan as the subject: and her father looking very worried and very sad, and Mrs. Wilfer imitating the portrait of Mrs. Siddons as The Tragic Muse.

This trance, of course, only lasted a second. Susie Wilbraham came forward with an assumption of ease, obviously counterfeit, and said: "Do you remember me, Bella? Your sister, Susan?" Then John, showing no sign of surprise, interrupted: "I'll go and write a few letters, Bella. I'd better shut that window before I go, lest you catch a chill, and I shall return in about

half an hour to see you off to bed. I am sure Miss Wil——" he hesitated over the name. Susie turned on him sharply: "*Wilbraham.* It's me stage name, me nom de théatre, as they say. I'm really Susan Wilfer——"

"Well, my dear sister-in-law, you won't keep Bella talking too long, I know. I expect you have heard from your mother that she has only recently got over her confinement, and has to be taken special care of. See you later." He left the room, carefully shutting the door, and ensconced himself in the library across the hall.

Bella had risen and offered her cheek to Susan, who, however, clasped her in an embrace of exaggerated affection, and as she did so Bella—shrinking from her—smelt the brandy in her breath. She somehow knew Susan's history from that moment.

She indicated another armchair for Susan to seat herself. The latter untied her bonnet strings—the bonnet was very small and flat, the strings were of purple ribbon and extensive—and removed it from her untidy mass of brown-black hair. Then she sought for a handkerchief, and gave way to hysterical crying. She was extravagantly dressed; but her clothes seemed out of season, more suited to winter or early spring than mid-summer, and the trailing skirts were steeped in road dust.

"Oh, *Bella!*" she gasped, "take me in for *just* this night! Mother refused to when I went round to Holloway this evening. All I got out of her was your address, and she said your husband wouldn't be best pleased to see me. He didn't look it, either. Take me in to-night. My gentleman has turned me out . . . on the streets"—(she cried convulsively)—"I've no money, and if you put me out, too, I shall just go to the river and drown meself——"

"What gentleman?" asked Bella.

"Why, Mr. Wayson, to whom I'm as good as married, and who's been listening to a pack of lies about me——"

"But why do you call yourself Wilbraham?"

"Oh *that!* Why, because when I first left home I went off with a gentleman of that name, and it was so like Wilfer that it seemed almost providential. I thought 'Susie Wilbraham' just right for a stage name to dance under. For I did get several engagements on the boards—the Britannia and the Grecian. . . . But I seemed to do better for myself in a private line, so to speak. . . . But it's a long story I've got to tell. . . . I've been very hard treated. I'll tell you everything to-morrow after breakfast. . . . You will put me up, won't you——?"

"Would you mind pulling that bell rope near you?"

Susie did as she was asked. A servant was soon in the room.

"James! Would you find your master—I think he is in the library—and say I should like to speak to him?"

John is by her side in a minute.

"John, darling, I'm a tiresome little goose, but I'm feeling *dreadfully* faint. Susie wants us to put her up for the night. . . . You don't mind, do you?" (timidly stroking his hand).

"Mind? Of course not. Shall I send for your maid? And then you must go to your room like a good obedient wifie."

The maid comes.

"Masters!" said Mrs. Harmon. "This lady, Miss Wilbraham, is staying here to-night. Would you get the second spare room ready as quickly as possible . . . and ask cook to make some sandwiches and . . . what wine would you like, Susie?"

"Port, a glass of port."

"Very well, then, bring a decanter of port on the

tray with the sandwiches, or, rather, Alice can do that, whilst you and Emily get the room ready. Miss Wilbraham has not got her luggage with her, so please put out for her use night things of mine, will you? John, darling, you shall see me up stairs, and then come back and entertain Susie until her room is ready."

On the way up the staircase, while Susie is gazing into the stove ornament in the grate and shedding a few vinous tears, Bella says to John: "My *darling!* Can you forgive me for all the trouble I am bringing on you? My dreadful relations!"

"Nothing," he says, "will be a trouble to me so long as you get well and keep well."

Then he returns to his study to receive Susan's account of herself.

"Do you mind my smoking?" he begins, seating himself in the armchair Bella has quitted.

"*Lord,* no! I smoke meself sometimes. Y' haven't got such a thing as a cigarette in the house, I suppose? Or one o' those little pieces of paper and some pipe tobacco? I could roll myself one——"

"Sorry! I know what you mean, but I only smoke pipes and cigars. . . . However——"

"Oh, never mind. It must be gettin' on in time, and you won't want to stop away from Bella too long. S'pose you want to know all about me? Ma's told you nothin'?"

"I want first to know, am I to call you Susan or Susie?"

"'Chever you please——"

"Well, then, Susie, you ran away from home. . . . When?"

"Nine years ago——"

"And you went to live with a Mr. Wilbraham?" —(she nods)—"And he didn't marry you?"—(she shakes her head)—"What was he?"

"Man who had the circus that sometimes came to

Holloway Fields. He promised to get me an engagement to dance at a theatre or at a circus, but the managers to whom he introduced me said I couldn't dance—hadn't been prop'ly trained. . . . *I* dunno—I think he meant to do the right thing by me, but one of his wives turned up from Birmingham and made a hell of a row, so I sloped. The circus just then was in Northamptonshire—I didn't quite know what to do, thought I'd walk to London, and try my luck there. . . . I'd got over some miles, and then I felt hungry, and me feet hurt me. I sat down by the side of the road and began to cry, an' a pretty young lady came riding up with her husband and asks what I was crying about. I told her some story—I dessay I told her the truth, I was that miserable. She told me to go to the big house I could see at the end of a long avenue and ask for the housekeeper, and say her Ladyship had told me to stay there and await her return.

"Well, presently she came back. It was the Countess of Towcester. Long and short of it was, she said she would find me a place as sewing maid (only I couldn't sew!)—unless I would like to go into a home. . . . I said I much preferred to take a place in her household and for a time I was happy enough. Then the butler came messing about me, and they found it out, and gave me ten pounds to make my way back to London, and the Countess advised me to go home to my mother and try to make a fresh start. Well, I was jolly well sick of Holloway—all us girls at home doing nothing, though Ma had tried to start a day-school—so instead I went and saw Kate Hamilton in the Haymarket, and she took me on as one of her girls and advanced the money for me to buy some good dresses. . . . But if I'm to tell you all my life for the last nine years whilst we sit here, I shall get you into trouble with Bella. She'll think I'm flirting with me brother-in-law." (Yawns prodigiously.)

"Quite so," said John, making an effort to conceal his utter disgust. "By this time they've got your room ready. I should advise you to have your breakfast in bed, and not to ask to see Bella till she comes downstairs. I will think over very carefully what I can do for you. But just remember this. I will do *nothing* if you vex, annoy, or even inconvenience Bella in any way. *In any way.* Sooner than that, I would put you out of the house myself——"

"Who says I'm going to upset her or annoy her?" said Susie, angrily. "A sister, after all, *is* a sister, the right person to turn to when you're in trouble, especially when your mother is a daft old geezer like our Ma. I shan't talk to the servants. I only said I was a relation——"

"Well, I thought it best to warn you, so that there might be no misunderstanding. I will see what can be done for you to-morrow"—(rings bell)—"Please ask Emily to come here and show Miss Wilbraham up to her room"—(goes out)—"Oh, is that you, Emily? Miss Wilbraham will breakfast in her room to-morrow morning. She has been very much upset at losing her luggage——"

He suddenly thought of this white lie, as a feeble expedient to explain her to the servants with as little slur as possible on Bella's relationships. He went to bed in his dressing-room that night so as not to awake and disturb his wife or tempt her to keep herself awake by talking about this appalling sister. Her brothers and sisters were what they were, without any blame attaching to her. Lavvy was a pert, suburban-minded young woman, but, at any rate, she was a hard-working, eminently respectable wife to George Sampson; and George, though far less interesting than a muscular navvy, was at least an honest clerk who earned his salary. John Wilfer fortunately lived at the Antipodes, and very likely would make good use

of three hundred pounds. Cecilia Davenant was essentially repellent with her plainness of feature and bad complexion, her untidy dress, skimpy hair, and her interest concentrated on her husband's and children's maladies; and Eldred Davenant's nauseous intermixture of belief in quack medicines and quack religions. But, at any rate, Cecilia had only once been to see them, and lived at Hornsey (a serious distance from Cavendish Square for a woman of the lower middle class before the days of motor buses and tube railways). . . . Reginald, the Wilfers' younger son, was reputed to be a bad lot, corrupted by the racecourses; but he was seemingly so engrossed in the rogueries of racing and betting that he had not noticed the fact of having a rich brother-in-law. He never communicated with his mother.

"If only that tiresome old fool does not, out of vanity, write to him! . . . I'll concentrate my thought just now on how to get rid of Susan without unkindness, and to that end I'll go first thing in the morning and consult with Lavvy."

On this conclusion he fell asleep, just after the chimes of the nearest church clock had announced two in the morning.

The morning thus heralded was one of glorious sunshine. "I must write to-day about those rooms at Freshwater Bay before I go out. Doctors notwithstanding, I carry you off there on Friday," he announced to Bella, while she was contemplating the letters on her breakfast tray.

She replied abstractedly: "Yes, that would be lovely." Then fell to opening and reading one of the letters.

"Isn't this *perfectly* maddening?" she exclaimed. "Read this."

John read aloud:

2, The Grove,
Finchley,
July 23, 1865.

My dear Bella,—

Your dear Mama has resumed her correspondence with us after a too long interval of silence, brought about by family dissensions, which I hope will now have healed. Having heard a rumour that you had married advantageously, we resolved to break the ice, and be the first to forgive; and your Mama, in replying to us and exchanging sisterly greetings, with no exacerbating references to dear Papa's will, gave us your address. We propose paying you a visit of ceremony, a "marriage call"; though we hear you have now given your husband two pledges of your love; still, you have not been married much more than two years, so we will consider it our marriage call, and shall hope henceforth to see much of you and the gentleman you have married; under romantic circumstances, we hear.

Therefore, if not inconvenient to yourself, we propose to charter a fly—as dear Papa used to say in his nautical way—from the livery stables at the Bull; and arrive at your mansion about three o'clock on Thursday next, to-day being Monday. We shall seem strangers, I fear, for we have not met you since you were a little baby, dear Papa not seeing eye to eye with Mr. Wilfer, your father, who, he considered, had far too large a family in proportion to his means. But, as we used to plead with him——

"I'm sure they did nothing of the kind, old cats," broke in Bella. "They did their best to set Grandpa against Pa and Ma, so as to get all his money."

John went on imperturbably:

——plead with him, *these* were matters dependent not on human will, but on the Divine ruling. In any case,

we will say, "Let bygones be bygones," and hope on Thursday to renew the happy relations which should always subsist between kinsfolk. Your Aunt Isabella —another Bella, you will observe, she and your dear Mama and I being named after—or should I say in accordance with?—the spirit of our dear father's employ. (He was for a very long period a captain in the service of the "Belle" line of paddle steamers which plied up and down the Channel and across to the Continent.) . . . But how I have wandered away from the beginning of the sentence! Your aunt Isabella joins me in affectionate greetings of love to you and your babes, and in kind regards to Mr. Harmon, whom we shall welcome as a Nephew.

Your affectionate Aunt,
DULCIBELLA MEDLICOTT.

John: "You haven't eaten all the breakfast you should while I have been reading. Write—civilly, of course; I hate discord between relations—and tell the old cats you will see them when you come back from the Isle of Wight."

"And now about Susan. Don't see her till you come down. If she's quiet, and isn't scandalising the servants—what a nuisance and *what* tyrants servants are! They're the spies Society sets on all our actions—let her stay on till after lunch. I wouldn't overdo the sister business in their presence. She promised me last night *she* wouldn't. I'm going out now to see Lavvy. . . . Get her opinion on what can be done with Susan."

Lavvy was found at her little house in Fulham, then almost a country village. She was very bright-eyed, keen-featured, and sharp of tongue, harrying her little maid-of-all-work over household duties. "George" had just started for the river-side to take the steamboat to Mark Lane pier.

"Good gracious me! What brings you here so early? Nothing wrong with Bella?"

"Well . . . it's this way." And he told of Susan's unheralded arrival, and her obvious undesirability as a guest on a prolonged stay. "I thought your clever little brain might find some way out of the difficulty if *I* found the money-cost of the plan. This is clear: she cannot stop with us—under present circumstances—and we must be leaving for the Isle of Wight on Friday. You and George must come to us later on. Of course"—(dubiously)—"we might ask Susan there . . . but I am so afraid of upsetting Bella's holiday——"

Lavvy: "I should think you were. As to me and George. . . . Thank you, kindly . . . Margate, p'raps, is more our style, when George can get his holiday. But I won't say no, offhand. About Susan. I ain't so surprised as you might think. Though I'm two years younger than Bella, I know a bit more about family affairs than she does, through keeping my eyes and ears open, and not being so easily taken in by Ma's nonsensical refusals to answer plain questions. I had heard long ago that Susan used to dance at Cremorne, and about her quarrel with a dreadful, disreputable woman—Kate Hamilton—who keeps a dancing place in the Haymarket. But as she went about under another name I didn't much bother, only hoped she'd keep herself *to* herself, an' leave us alone. There's lots of respectable families same as ours that's got a Susan and says nothing about it. But now she's planted herself on *you*——" (musingly).

John: "I was wondering whether you and George. . . . Of course I would pay all expenses——"

Lavvy: "Oh *dear* no! I'd sooner see her at the bottom of the river than playing her tricks here and reflecting on our good name in Fulham——"

John: "Then your other sister? Because it would be cruel to force her on your parents, just as they are moving to a new neighbourhood—and——"

Lavvy: "You mean Cecilia? Cissy, as we used to call her, till Ma revived her name in full, saying it was her sainted grandmother's. I said I'd seen no such saint in the calendar, since the one that used to play on a very old-fashioned kind of organ in Roman times. . . . Well . . . Cissy might agree. Her home is such a rum one, with the husband's medical contraptions and nonsense about phrenology and Christadelphianism. Susan couldn't make it much rummer. Well, you might try——"

John: "Of course, there's Mrs. Veneering at Calais——"

Lavvy: "That's a bright idea, if you're willing to fork out the expenses. I've never been to France, not having Bella's chances, but I should imagine Susan's goings-on would come natural to *them.* George, who saw her at Cremorne, said she used to dance the Cong-cong beautifully. Though what business *he* had at Cremorne, as I said, I should have liked to know, if he'd been married then——"

John: "I'll go and see Cecilia first. What's her address?" (Lavvy ran indoors to make sure, for much of this conversation took place in the little front garden.) "42, Mansfield Road, Hornsey? Thank you."

A brief visit to the City by river steamer and a return home for lunch. Susan, at lunch, dressed in some of Bella's clothes, with her hair done by Bella's maid, and with a sobered demeanour, seemed much more "possible" than when bedraggled, alcoholised, angry, and desperate, the night before. During luncheon John looked at her as much as was compatible with good manners, and decided that her wreckage of her life—she must now be about twenty-nine—was due to several

causes which the spirit of the 'sixties and of earlier decades scarcely realised or could put into words. We should have summed her up as "over-sexed, under-educated, and brought up in a slovenly idleness." She ought either to have been married at eighteen to a navvy or a prize fighter, and then have had by him, in due course, twelve children, and have suckled them all—then she might have become, in time, a good woman; *or* have been educated to some trade or profession and have been made to work hard at it for a decent salary. But the type-writer, the Post Office service, telegraphy for women, clerkships, and other decent occupations were far below the horizon in the 'fifties, when she was emerging from girlhood into womanhood.

Much of this John Harmon dimly understood. As he watched her he thought: "It ought to be either France, and opportunities to go gloriously to the bad, out of our sight and hearing; or some Colony, where some good-hearted man in a red flannel shirt would take her to wife, knock half a dozen children out of her, and restrict her to tea as a stimulant."

"Well? What do you make of me?" she said, looking up at him when the servants had finally left the room.

"I think," said John, "you haven't had your chance in life, and I'm going to see what I can do for you. Bella," he added, "I'm proposing to order the carriage for three o'clock, and taking you two out into the country for a drive."

At three he gave instructions to his coachman, before the ladies assembled in the hall, how to find the Mansfield Road, Hornsey. When the carriage drew up before No. 42 Bella looked very surprised; but, accustomed never to question her husband from the very beginning of her married life as to how, what, when,

why, and to credit him with knowing his own business best, she said nothing. Susan was very silent, but seemed to be enjoying unfeignedly this glimpse of the country; for Hornsey sixty years ago was quite rural. Mansfield Road ended nowhere in particular, though it branched off from the thoroughfare to London. No. 42 was a chemist's shop, disfigured with strange calico messages, related no doubt to the proceedings next door. "Next door" was a small chapel of quite exceptional ugliness in outline, building material, and windows. It was the stronghold of the Christadelphians, of whom Cecilia's husband, the sickly chemist, was the chief example. John Harmon, seized with misgivings as he left his carriage to enter the shop, said to his coachman hurriedly: "Drive back into the main road and wait for me at the lane leading to the churchyard; I shan't be long."

Then he entered the shop door. Bella's sister Cecilia (as he guessed) and her chemist husband were both behind the counter. But for the accidental scalding of one of their children which had just taken place they might have fastened on him an attention there would have been no gainsaying. Fortunately, this child had been badly scalded, and they had only just assuaged its yells with bandaging and lozenges to suck; so they turned on the entrant a distracted gaze and an untidy attention. "I want a packet of magnum bonum lozenges," he said breathlessly (the carriage having driven on).

"Magnum bonum?" said Mr. Davenport. "We have no magnum bonum. I no longer believe in them. But I can sell you some of my own manufacture; the Mirabellum."

"Have you got them ready, because I am rather in a hurry?"

"Certainly. One shilling a small box; half a crown——"

"Oh, a shilling box will be quite enough."

He paid, snatched up a box, and hurried out to catch up his carriage. He felt he would sooner offer a guarded hospitality to Susie than make himself known to Cecilia and her husband.

CHAPTER V

CHIEFLY PARIS IN 1867

MISS SUSIE WILBRAHAM, after all, went down with the John Harmons to the Isle of Wight. John Harmon, for the time, was more preoccupied over his wife's health than any other question. The quiet life and gentle airs of Freshwater Bay were very different, even in those distant days, from the inland Freshwater which is one of the ugliest and most uninteresting of Isle of Wight villages. At length, when Bella had really regained her health, and the calm, summer weather of early September was becoming flecked with disagreeable interludes of rain and cold winds, John took Susan with him to Havre and thence across country to Calais. Here he placed her with Mrs. Veneering who was paid, in advance, a hundred pounds to keep this ebullient personality for at least a year. She started life again with a good wardrobe and slightly chastened manners. Bella had just tolerated her at Freshwater Gap; had not been unkind; but she and John had gone their own ways pretty much together and were really very little hampered by Susan's presence. Susan, for some inscrutable reason, was liked by her two-year-old niece and few-months-old nephew; she was a source of much whispered and interesting discussion between the two nurses, who agreed generally that if she was not Mrs. Harmon's sister she must be her cousin on both sides. She was vaguely supposed to have had an unfortunate career on the stage—which did not lower her in their opinion—and to be chiefly occupied in restoring mind and body under

the genial auspices of the master, and to be of some help in amusing and interesting Miss Hetty and Master Reggie.

Susan rather liked the idea of trying life from a new standpoint with Mrs. Veneering in France. It pledged her to nothing; France, to her lustful, uncultivated mind, sounded tempting; the chief abode of pleasure in this life. If she liked life with the Veneerings she would stay; if she didn't she would go. A journey as far as New Zealand did not attract her at all, though her brother-in-law extolled its glories and its advantages. She might think about it later; but meantime the chance, the possible chance of getting to PARIS transported her with delight. She had heard somewhere, somehow, in her murky labyrinths that two years hence there would be, in Paris, an EXHIBITION, some gathering of the clans far more wonderful and dainty than the Great Exhibition which had now become the suburban Crystal Palace; some great opportunity for good-looking Englishwomen, not too much fettered by scruple.

So accordingly, she departed for Villa les Acacias in September, 1865, with anticipatory pleasure rather than with any dislike to leaving her contemptuous sister and her genial, but quite unapproachable brother-in-law. Hamilton Veneering was once more away from his wife and children when she arrived. Mrs. Veneering seemingly resigned herself, with an occasional sigh to his long absences. Occasionally he sent her sums of money to buy a greater degree of comfort, or to put on one side against new difficulties. Her two elder children were growing up strong and healthy — and thoughtful; they gave her little trouble. The youngest boy was a fretful baby, but the house was large and comfortable and somewhat isolated; and the garden was a delight to her. She was gradually changing from the empty-headed, frivolous, over-dressed, and bejew-

elled woman of second-rate London Society into the thrifty manageress of a farm, wholly content with her three children, more and more reconciled to the long absences of an uninteresting husband, more and more appreciative of France and of the Roman Church, less and less concerned with smug, Victorian England.

Annie Veneering—as she was coming to be called by Sophie's influence — thoroughly appreciated the hundred pounds put into her hands by John Harmon, as a year's payment in advance for looking after Susie Wilbraham. Susie's relationship to Bella was distinctly stated; but, for the rest, she was given a character of unhappiness in stage life and need for recuperation. After which, a fresh career on the stage if opportunity offered; or the joining of a brother in one of our newer colonies. The one direction in which the gently hidden influence of John Harmon was directed was against her return to England, at any rate whilst Bella might feel embarrassed by a sister's struggles with the dusky surroundings—then—of a stage career. The French Theatre was evincing some inclination towards British actresses who would undertake distinctly British rôles in French comedies—but meantime—Mrs. Veneering wanted a young person's help with children and possibly with guests; there was the garden—already absorbent of much energy and productive of some revenue. In short, Calais was in France and half-way to Paris.

Bella prolonged her stay at Freshwater Gap till October, so delightful was the air, were the sunshine, the chalk cliffs, the children's happiness. John had once more gone on to Belgium and Holland over his drugs, after depositing Susan at Calais. In mid-October he conveyed a quite hearty wife and two very healthy children back to the Cavendish Square neighbourhood, and threw himself with increasing energy into the Drug Question. Only one more of Bella's

brothers and sisters remained to worry him: "Reggie," who had drifted off from some clerical employment in London to be a bookmaker's clerk in Birmingham, in 1859: since when nothing had been heard of him.

The unhappy Veneering, in the autumn of 1865, felt himself more and more occluded at Baden-Baden, at any rate unutterably bored. Yet his luck at the Monte Carlo tables was so bad, and at Baden he tended to recover. Alfred Lammle was becoming so deep and mysterious, so often in written communication with Sophronia, that they had ceased to be companionable, and more than once he, Alfred, had spoken so rudely to his friend that the latter had really wondered whether "1865" and his doubtful reputation would stand a duel, and whether Alfred was egging him on to one. He went back to Calais at Christmas, '65, and saw Susan there. She at once aroused a sexual longing in his debased mind, but he was careful now about his entanglements. As to what she thought of him, there was no saying. She scarcely seemed to take much notice of his sidelong looks and sighs.

"Why don't you go back to London?" said his wife in February '66. . . . . .

"Mr. Harmon has arranged so many of your affairs that I dare say he could arrange a little more and you might positively enjoy regular work again. I don't say *I* would throw up this place at once and return, but I would if you *really* settled down at home and resumed work in the City. We could then find some place in Essex, near where your father lived, near Dunmow—I've always heard that part well spoken of. I could farm there whilst you worked once more with your drugs and chemicals in town. I hear the business is getting on wonderfully, and that Mr. Wilfer, old Mr. Wilfer, is developing into quite a wonder."

"No!" he answered in a peevish tone. "Harmon has virtually bought us out to pay my debts—or some

of them—and I've grown rusty. More than that! I've grown to *hate* drugs and all about them. I've forgotten more than I ever knew. My career must be on this side now. I'm forty-six—too old to start in a business again, which one left some time ago; for really after we lived at Brompton I did not work much at the office. Lammle spoilt it all somehow, or his slut of a wife did. . . . How are you getting on with Susie? Seems a rum go having her here? A sister-in-law of John Harmon's? I s'pose he wanted her out of the way. A good-looking wench. Been on the stage you think?"

"I *don't* think: I know she has. But she seems to have had some shock and doesn't like to talk about it. She's—here, go and shut that door if you want to talk her over"—(he does so) "she's been on the stage and wants to go back; and in some moods she wants to join her brother in New Zealand. He's going to get married and make his fortune out of doing something colonial. Susie says she's seen some of his letters to Bella Harmon. They didn't sound very attractive, all about fighting and most shocking atrocities. Still she says the life sounded exciting and he seemed to be picking things up. Well if you're not going to work again in Mincing Lane and you aren't going to settle down here—which is what *I* wanted you to do—what *are* you going to do, 'cause it's very disturbing to me——" And here she trailed off into the somewhat doleful chapter of complaints which was rather her wont, and wholly excusable.

"No. I think I shall go back to the Rhine Valley again—and—and look about me. The Germans are up to several interesting things. I believe the Prussians are going to war with Austria to settle which is to be mistress over Germany . . . but there are other directions in which I think things may develop; in any case I'm ut-ter-ly sick of England; UTTERLY. I now HATE

London. You've no chance there unless you're a swell, or a swindler—like Lammle."

"Hush, dear! You don't know who might overhear you!"

"Well Susan, or Susie, might. . . . What'd it matter?"

"Why, unless you could prove it—and why should you? What *should* we gain? By all means have nothing more to do with them, but I feel, somehow, as though they'd become too powerful to make enemies of——"

"Dessay. Well! I think I shall go back to Baden next month and look about me. How long does that Wilfer woman stay here?"

"As long as she likes and can pay a hundred a year."

In April, Veneering, after occasional trips to Amsterdam and Rotterdam, went back to Baden-Baden. Already in between these Dutch trips, Susan Wilbraham had become his mistress. But only occasionally and quite unknown to his wife. At the beginning of June, Hamilton returned for a few days to the Villa les Acacias. Three days after he had left, Susie Wilbraham disappeared. Mrs. Veneering had gone to Marquise on some poultry business, imagining that Susie would, as usual, look after things till she returned. But on getting back at eight o'clock in the evening there was no Susie; only a rather badly-worded note "I am off for a few months change and praps a return to the stage. Dident want to bother you or upset the Harmons by discussing it. I will let you know my plans later on. I may be going to Paris."

As a matter of fact she joined Veneering at Baden-Baden, had fiendish luck at the tables, was often false to her protector and he knew it and shrugged his shoulders; but by following her play he won. A real Devil's

escapade. The seven thousand pounds had been gradually reduced to little more than three thousand by all his vagaries at Monaco and Monte Carlo, at Spa, and in Holland. But it now, even with Susie's demands on it for costumes and capital, was mounting steadily, till it actually reached to seven thousand once again. And even rose above it—eight thousand—nearly nine thousand. This, and his well-attested banking account, revived or for the first time, created a certain amount of respect for him in South Germany.

Annie Veneering, hearing nothing of Baden-Baden affairs (which in those days hardly got into the English or even the French papers) knew nothing of these adulterous developments. She had apprised John Harmon of his sister-in-law's disappearance—had even offered to return the unspent balance of the hundred pounds. But he had bade her keep it all, in case Susie turned up again some other day and craved further hospitality. "Though Mrs. Veneering must not consider herself bound, etc., etc." He shrewdly guessed—and verified the guess—as to where Susie was. Veneering, he decided, was a pig . . . he would have nothing more to do with him, now that the affairs of his firm were transferred to Harmon. It was a good job Veneering had sickened of the drug business. They would get on better without his presence in Mincing Lane. His wife, after all, was a decent sort, managing her affairs with discretion; *and* his children—well, perhaps, some day something might be done—for the eldest boy, at any rate.

As to the Sophie so often mentioned by Mrs. Veneering—Sophronia Lammle—she settled down to her duties in Paris during 1866. Deep down, below blankets of secrecy, she was to study Fenianism in Paris, get to know who the Fenians were and what they were plotting. This was not over difficult, because

scarcely one of them could speak much French, not even those who had had a Catholic education at Louvain or elsewhere in Flanders. About the only one of them—and he was a much later example — who mastered French till he came to speak it like his own tongue, came to think in it, was Fergus O'Connor, the six months' lover of Mrs. Warren. His elder brother, Deirdre, had come to Paris in 1866 and got taken on as a worker in the Great Exhibition. Sophronia—or had I not better now call her by the later diminutive of "Sophie?"—Sophie Lammle soon realised him and got into relations with him, being very careful to say little about herself except the Spanish element in her blood and her dislike of England.

Poor Dierdre was misplaced in Paris. He had had a brief experience of the United States, and like nearly all the Irishmen of post-1815 and pre-1922 could not master French. The United States, subsequent to 1845, did very much for the Irish, but it gave them the White American's undying accent and great inability to speak any language but English.

Deirdre's brother, of whom I have written guardedly in another book, was eight years younger and had never crossed the Atlantic, had come to Flanders when he was only seventeen or eighteen, and, at a later date had become, under strange circumstances, the father of Vivien Warren. Deirdre, after serving with the Fenians, had, under the directions of their Colonel Fariola, come to Paris, got engaged early in 1866 by the committee organising the Great Exhibition, and was waiting events and instructions.

I rather fancy he had declared himself to be an American, to the American—United States—section; or perhaps he had been engaged by some French department; perhaps even his origin and his motives may have been a little guessed by the remarkable Monsieur Charlevoix who thought it better to have *him* (more

manageable by the clever Madame Sophie Lamelle) than an older, ruggeder, uglier, harsher type from the United States or the worst part of Ireland. There he was, however, among the staff of the Exposition Internationale; with Bérézovski (nourishing projects of hatred against Russia); Pručik going to give it hot to the Emperor Francis of Austria-Hungary if he came along and had not previously helped Bohemia a little more towards independence; Casciotto of Trieste, too late to free Venice, so now (though of Lombard birth) awake to the distress of the Triestino; Paravesi who hoped to assassinate Pio Nono if he left Rome and came to Paris; Aglorio Vastidão keen on the Lusitanian Republic; Gutierrez Blasimalco for the Basques against Fat Isabella of Spain; and one or two mad Southerners, who thought they could never return to the United States, so would empty a revolver or plunge a bowie knife into President Johnson or General Grant if either should be foolish enough to leave Washington for Paris any time the Exhibition might be open.

Mrs. Lammle had settled down to her duties in Paris early in 1866, and took a quiet lodging not far from the Avenue de la Motte-Piquet, in Passage Bosquet. Here she worked steadily at the French language, knowing that at her age she could never have other than an English accent; still determined to be fluent of phrase and to understand what was said to her. During the day she worked hard at preparing her *loge,* her location, which by some caprice was to represent, not a whole department, but just the district of Béarn, a region, she had been told, specially connected with Henry IV. of Navarre, who had been a famous king of France and with whose reign had begun the "Ancien régime," the advent of the Bourbons as the ruling family. The Empress was reputed—as she was, no doubt, a little wearily—to be "tocquée des Bourbons" and therefore interested in Béarn. Certain it is, that on the great day

of opening, on April 1, 1867—a day of sunlight but of wintry temperature—she, despite the shortening of the intended programme, stopped outside one of the two "faces" of the Béarn *loge* and asked a question. An aimless question, perhaps, but an amiable one. She was not feeling very well and was anxious about her son's health. The Emperor, too, was so unwell that it was an effort, one that must be made to stop the impertinences of the Opposition, to come out that day. He had to walk with a stick and inwardly wished himself, many times over, in bed. "Que dis-tu, ma chère Ugénie?" he inquired with amiability.

"Je demande de Madame le nom de cette plante qu'ils ont là, dans le p'tit bassin. Il me semble que je l'ai vue dans les Pyrénées."

Sophie gathered up all her courage: it was *the* moment of her life.

"C'est le petit—le petit—Ah! je ne sais pas le mot béarnais—ne Rhododendron des Pyrénées. Il nous est envoyé parmi nos—nos—fleurs sauvages pour—pour faire les guirlandes dont nous avons decoré notre loge."

"Vous n'êtes pas française, Madame, cela se voit tout de suite de votre accent, mais vous servez à cet instant la France admirablement, en nous démontrant les produits de nos Pyrénées," said the Empress, looking very straight,—some people said—others, very fixedly—at Mme. Sophie Lamelle, and then passing on.

Her two Parisian assistants had evidently been chosen or suggested by the mysteriously powerful Mons. Charlevoix. Probably there were very few educated Béarnais at Paris in those days, or if there were they were more knit up with other expositions of Pyrenean products, arts, and industries. Béarn was more than 400 miles from Paris. The stall "*purement fantasque en origine et but*" (as Mons. Charlevoix had afterwards informed the authorities of the Exhibition) was intended, more particularly, to exhibit the flower

resources of the Pyrenees. The assistants provided for Mme. Sophie Lamelle were two Parisian women on the police staff, ready to go anywhere and do anything at a few minutes' notice; and some further native workers who were too stupid to ask questions or make mischief.

These last were two very muscular young women, clever with flowers, and one "gros gaillard," lover to both of them, when he thought of it: who did the grosser manual work, talked Basque and bad French.

Even in those days, and indeed from 1814 onwards, there had been British "interests" in the Pyrenees—at Pau over fox-hunting, over the surveying and first building of the Pyrenean railways which had been carried on by English people; so it did not, perhaps, seem altogether strange that the leading representative of the flower industries of Béarn should be some kind of Englishwoman—or, as she gently suggested without telling a downright lie, a lady of both Spanish and Irish origin. Sophie, moreover, in her Pyrenean gala costume, though she had never been in Béarn, looked more Béarnaise than her two Parisian assistants and nearly as much so as the three good-looking but coarser-built Pyreneans who did the humbler work of the *loge*.

One day, early in May, Mons. Charlevoix strolled past her *loge* and stopped to glance at the bunches and baskets of flowers. It was too early for fruit so the chief exhibits of the *loge* were flowers, Pyrenean plants, and Pyrenean pottery. Charlevoix was dressed like a gay tourist of those days, partly because the weather had become warm and sunny, and partly in order not to look too official. It was indeed, from his straw hat, not impossible that he might be English, a point often a matter of doubt to the Parisians, because to them his stiff English seemed positively 'de Londres.' "Vous allez bien, ma chère Béarnaise?" he inquired gallantly, twirling his cane and adjusting his English straw hat. "Si vous avez le temps et que ces belles dames"

(smiles from the Parisian helpers who knew who he was all the time) "que ces dames béarnaises vaquent à tout . . . faites, je vous prie, un petit tour de promenade avec moi. Votre costume est si beau qu'il me ragaillardera." Sophie, who had been making nosegays from the Pyrenean flowers in the hampers, handed over her work to one of the smiling Parisiennes. Then, dusting her Béarnais costume with a fleck or two, she joined Charlevoix outside the lodge. They strolled without hurry to the vicinity of the Russian section and sat down in a quiet spot.

"Zere will be a Ball," he said, in rather slow English, "at your Embassy one day soon, near ze middle of May. . . . You follow me? . . . I will have you asked as one of ze guests, but perhaps by a different name—perhaps not. . . . At any rate you will go. Our office will pay for ze ball dress, which must be *distinguée sans être trop remarquable*. . . . Just quietly —su-perbe—sans trop entraver vos mouvements. You will not dance unless I come and suggest it. . . . Well, zen, you must look out hard—oh, but *harrd* for zis—il a un drôle de nom!—zis Deirdre O'Connor. I —we—are pret-ty sure he will come here as waiter. . . . Dieu! Comme votre langue m'épuise, surtout quand on ne peut pas lever la voix. . . . parler aux éclats et avec des gestes. . . . Let—us walk a little. We nevare know when some one may not listen."

They walked on. Presently they were strolling through the Tunisian section. Young Moors (or more likely Jews dressed to look like Moors) were stringing musical instruments, painting crudely, but effectively, pottery which would afterwards be baked; engraving metal plates. They paid little attention to this eccentric European couple of a well-dressed man (for his time) and a stoutish, middle-aged lady in a peasant's gala dress. Charlevoix resumed: "Seek for zis Deirdre whom you know . . . when did you see him last?

Wed-nes-day? Well . . . you suggest to him *nossing* about you going to Ball at Embassy. But try to find out if *he* is going . . . and how. . . .Et faîtes tout à l'amiable. . . . I shall . . . also be zere. How dressed? I am not sure just now, but I will let you know. . . . Well zen, now you . . . know mos' sings "—(half whispers)—" I sink it will be ze seventeens . . . a . . . Friday . . . Drôle de jour, par exemple! You must commence to arrange your dress—tout de suite! I will pay for it, of course. It must be 'choisi,' pas trop remarquable, de sorte que vous n'attrayiez pas trop l'attention là-dessus. Mais bien choisi. . . . Yet it must not be such as would embarrass you. You mus' be free to move *kwicklee*, si c'est nécessaire. I will come here a day . . . or . . . two days before ze date and talk about zis. . . . Je donnerai un coup d'œuil quelque part à vot' costume. . . .Tout est compris? Pour sûr? Alors—à tantôt, chère dame. En sortant d'ici regagnez vot' loge sans trop d'entrain et ne dîtes pas mot de tout ceci. Say *nossing* about zis, to your companions. Ne vous fiez à *personne*——"

Sophie's dress (I see from an old letter) came to be something like this:

There was what we should call a "jupe" or foundation—mainly skirt—of white satin, bordered with an orange silk cord, with three broad *ruches* of orange ribbon running up each seam. Over this magnificent undergarment was worn a "robe" of orange velvet, short in front, open at each side, and terminating *à la queue,* and having short, wide sleeves lined with white satin and finished with short white silk tassels. The corsage was cut rather low. Just inside the front of the bodice could be seen a chemisette of white pleated muslin. (I write these lines from Sophie's notes, in ink now brown, without quite understanding the general effect, but am given to understand that, with its attendant coiffure of interlacing gilded chains confining

with neatness her splendid black hair, it was considered in general—by Mons. Charlevoix and public opinion—to be "quiet, distinguished, and not too provocative of notice, while asserting a certain aristocracy of taste.")

Her invitation to the great Ball at the British Embassy had nothing extraordinary about it. The engraved wording was in French, and inserted in obviously French handwriting was her name: "Madame Alfréd Lamelle." At the head of the invitation it was intimated that Their Majesties the Emperor and the Empress, Their Royal Highnesses the Prince of Wales and the Duke of Edinburgh were expected to be present.

As instructed by Mons. Charlevoix, Sophie had really been admitted on the scene a few minutes prior to the opening of the doors to the earlier of the real guests. The rest of her colleagues from the Ministry of Police and its allied departments were three or four women of undoubted physical strength, combined with orderly attractions and skirts of moderate length, and about thirty-five male police agents wearing admirably-cut evening clothes, and sufficiently, but not obtrusively, decorated with French or foreign orders. They were tall, powerful men, who mostly stood, during the evening, in an unobtrusive way and place—unless their professional services should be called for. All alike had a small passe-partout key on a watch chain or in a pocket. They had been told to feel at ease, to feel it permissible to go anywhere in the Embassy or in the Embassy Garden, but not without necessity to make any display of this permeability. The Ambassador and Ambassadress, entering the Great Ball Room "pour se satisfaire d'un coup d'œuil," coldly bowed to them, knowing by the hour they were not the real guests. They conversed about "cases" in undertones.

Then the hour struck. The great gates, the great doors, were thrown open; there was infinite fuss and a subdued clamour of persons of high degree arriving

and knowing "qu'il fallait se ranger" before the Royalties appeared with the Ambassador and Ambassadress. For a moment they would glance at Sophie and her companions, a little surprised to see people already there. "Tiens! je nous croyais absolument les premiers," some puzzled young officer would say. For the most part they were taken to be guests staying with the Embassy.

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Where was Deirdre? Sophie's little passe-partout enabled her to pass almost anywhere, and if it were shown or hinted at, to have effect in the interviewing of superior servants or of any other police officer. He—Deirdre—did not seem to be among the extra waiters outside the domestic staff of the Embassy.

At last she recognised him in the orchestra, the huge orchestra which was commencing to play "*Partant pour la Syrie*" as the Emperor and Empress, the Prince of Wales and Duke of Edinburgh, the Ambassador and Ambassadress, and the rest of the princely and diplomatic guests passed slowly, gracefully, serenely into the Ball Room. Deirdre's burning eyes in his pale face were not fixed on the sheet of music opposite his violin; they were turned on the Prince of Wales. . . . Sophie took the arm of one amongst the forty detectives in the guise of a French noble—just for a moment hesitating, then yielding with a courteous smile his attention when he saw, projecting from her glove, the angle of her passe-partout.

"Deirdre," she said in English, as they pressed up to and past the rail round the orchestra, "*so* pleased to see you here. . . . Memorable occasion, isn't it? I'm enjoying it so much. As soon as you can get away from your duties, come to me. I shan't be dancing, I think—at any rate, not at present, while the Royalties are here——"

Then thanking her *policier* partner in her best

French, she took a chair as near to the orchestra as possible, and kept constantly looking at Deirdre. During these minutes, which seemed to be hours, while fanning herself with her white lace fan, she kept her eyes nearly always on Deirdre's face. She was seized with a horrible dread that if she got up and strolled away Deirdre would do something desperate to the Prince of Wales, who was dancing a quadrille just then with the Empress as his partner.

At last this Imperial and Royal quadrille, with its admixture of princes and peers, came to an end. The partners paced round the respectful circle. The eyes of the Empress met those of the half-frightened woman who had risen from her chair, but seemed to be trying with her back hair to keep Deirdre mesmerised. The Empress was mostly between him and the prince he seemed to threaten. After this instant's gaze, Eugénie's beautiful eyes sought other faces, and exchanged smiles for solemn reverences. At last it was only her long curls at the back of her head, her lovely shoulders, and graceful back that Sophie saw. She turned her face round to that of the livid Deirdre. Through hypnotism, hesitation, or cowardice, he had missed his chance of a sensational shot at the Heir to the British Empire. . . . She walked to the orchestral rail. "You are not well," she said in English, "ask permission to withdraw. I will wait. Come with me into the garden and recover yourself." For a moment she looked at the innumerable guests who were now surging towards the middle of the great room. The Imperial and Royal Quadrille being over they, with greater *abandon,* were to waltz, schottische, polk, or mazurk. The Royalties were drawing off, more to the end of the room, to sit and talk. Deirdre joined Sophie, and she led him, for he seemed ill, out—by degrees—into the garden, which passed from the back of the house towards the Champs Elysées.

"I will see you to the very gate and open it—if it is locked. But if you have any desire to live, any shred of faith—for I can't possibly explain out of doors in a ball dress, and in a place where any one may come upon us in an instant, *how* I am here and why—you will go back to your lodgings, pack up, and start off by a morning train for Dieppe or Havre. Telegraph to me where you are staying at either place, and I will endeavour to send you there a passport if you have not one, and the means to purchase a ticket back to the States. I can think of nothing else at the moment. Here we are. Don't stop at anything; don't run, but otherwise . . . bolt."

There were several police and gendarmes on the lonely, shaded walk outside, and they cast round eyes on this handsome, gorgeously-dressed woman talking in English. Still, she was seemingly at home, and she seemingly talked in English. Deirdre flitted hatless into the shadows. . . . Sophie was nearly indoors again, but at the garden entrance she ran into Charlevoix. Rather adroitly she swooped on the inside of the door, and confronted him from the inside. He was querulous. "You take sings wiz a high hand, Madame——" he was beginning. "Sh!" she exclaimed, indicating with a slight gesture a round-eyed young Secretary of Legation, who was wondering what the doose these foreigners were up to, but it was altogether a rum occasion, and extraordinary liberties were being granted to the French police.

Charlevoix and Sophie passed on till they found themselves in the temporary quietude of some Secretary's room, not far from the Ball Room. Here, in the dusk, softly lit by turned-down gas, she resumed speaking.

"I may have acted hastily," she said, "but I know something of this young man. He is more fool than knave, and better fitted to write a silly poem than to fire

a pistol. All my instincts tell me that it is better policy for *you* to give him this one more chance. Let him go away, to England, Ireland, America, where he will: he'll scarcely trouble you again; at any rate, for a year or so. He had his chance, and missed it. I think partly because I perpetually got between him and his aim. He was altogether a fool! Why *dream* of using a *pistol!* However, there it is! I could swear he won't trouble you again."

"I understand. Still, ce roman que vous me contez fera pauvre apparence dans mon compte-rendu au Ministère. Cependant . . . il . . . s'en . . . est . . . allé. Je me satisferai qu'il parte de la gare St. Lazare demain—ou plutôt ce matin. S'il ne part pas, nous saurons qu'il est plus malin que toi."

Half in admiration he *tutoyer'd* the clever woman. For her part, she was a little inclined to cry. She had never—as you know—been able to play a villain's part all through. Deirdre was a stagey fool, but she pitied him. Why were the Irish like that, a-dream always about something, something not practical? What earthly good to Ireland would be the wounding or assassination of the Prince of Wales in the presence of the Empress? She had more or less guessed his secret from the first time they met, a year before. . . . Well . . . p'raps, after all, he would settle down in the States, or—more sensible still—in Ireland.

CHAPTER VI

L'EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE: 1867

OUT of all the band of intentional or possible political assassins whom I mentioned in a previous chapter—Deirdre O'Connor for Ireland, Bérézovski for Poland, Pručik for the Chekhs, Casciotto for Trieste, Paravesi for Rome, Aglorio Vastidão for Lusitania, Gutierrez Blasimalco for the Basque peasants, and the lean, falcon-eyed, obsessed, and wearisome Southerners who couldn't, and never would be able to, speak anything but American-English, and *still* wanted to divide the United States in favour of negro slavery—the only one whose pistol really did get discharged was Bérézovski, who fired at the carriage containing the Emperor Alexander II. on June 6, 1867. He only, I believe, succeeded in shooting through the nostrils of the carriage horses and injuring his own hand. But he raised a great to-do, and incidentally benefited Mme. de Lamelle's position; for it was privately recorded in her favour how cleverly, and without scandal, *she* had averted any such attempt on the Prince of Wales. What happened to Bérézovski I have never explored sufficiently to find out or to remember; I expect he was not executed. But the excitement, and the lack of popular sympathy with the attempt (except on the part of certain politicians of the Opposition, just beginning their careers, who occasionally exclaimed "Vive la Pologne!") somewhat deterred the other threateners and attempters, so that they gradually faded away; while Sophie distinctly rose in Mons. Charlevoix's estimation. Indeed, had there not been an Alfred in exist-

ence and occasionally in evidence—quietly prospering in a rather nefarious yet legal way—he might even have proposed marriage. Unable to do that, and Alfred being very seldom in Paris or *en évidence,* he suggested less licit arrangements, which Sophie, conscious now of her power, gracefully evaded.

She had long before decided that she would stick to her bargain with the Ministry of Police, to see the Exhibition "through"; to assist in watching against such attempts as Bérézovski's until the Exhibition doors were closed at the end of October. After that? Married life with Alfred was no longer a possibility. She loathed the idea too intensely. Already there was, by amicable arrangement, complete separation of fortunes. He had succeeded in pacifying his creditors in England; he was free to go back there at any time, but he now much preferred to live abroad, mainly at Monaco. He was acquiring there a valuable reputation for tolerable honesty, consistent with pigeon-shooting, orderly gambling, and a mysterious connection with "les Affaires." Sophie had always retained her father's bequest of the £115 annuity. She had, during the Exhibition time, invested about £4,000 as her share of their joint profits, leaving her Alfred with £6,000 on which to face the world; and at the same time she now received a salary and allowances. They were aware that Hamilton Veneering had been making money at Baden-Baden, and also making a fool of himself with an English actress of poor character, who was now supposed to have quitted him and come to Paris, to commence a career of profligacy amid the splendours of the Exhibition.

Alfred Lammle, however, though he might not seem rich, had got hold of one or two good things at Monaco-Monte Carlo; and if he did not lose his head, or play the fool, he might yet retire in his old age on a sufficiency.

One day, at the end of July, when the Exhibition was becoming exceedingly hot and the great people of Paris were flocking to the sea-coasts and the mountains, to their ancestral homes and to Switzerland; and the Great Exhibition was being crowded by French peasants, English tourists, and strange beings from Germany, Austria, Italy, and Spain, there paused in front of Sophie's *loge,* on the Rue de Paris side, a party of three English people: an ample elderly man of great pomposity, having on his arm an ample middle-aged woman, and next to the woman an evident daughter, slim, rather peaky, and rather uglily dressed. Why they had stopped there they hardly knew; perhaps because Sophie's *loge,* with one side facing the charming, foliaged, fountained Central Garden, and the other the busy Rue de Paris, looked restful; the nosegays of Pyrenean plants were compact and not expensive and full of sweet odours, the pottery was quaint, and also cheap; none of the objects, indeed, were dear, and all were clearly marked, and Sophie, who happened to be there, was becomingly, rather showily dressed, and so much filled out and tranquillised that she was positively handsome; at any rate, very well made up. She recognised them at once. Mr., Mrs., and Miss Podsnap. To Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap her face seemed vaguely familiar, but, of course, was utterly irreconcilable with her position. They did not know where "Béarn" was, but labels about the place connected it somehow with the Pyrenees, and the Pyrenees were a chain of mountains separating France from Spain.

Georgiana Podsnap, inspired by love, broke through the veil: "It's *Sophronia!*" she exclaimed with a subdued shriek, "Sophronia, whom I haven't seen for four years. . . . How . . . *how wonderful.*" Her parents at once decided to withdraw, but Georgiana rebelled. After all, by now she was twenty-three, and had come into her grandmamma's money — twenty thousand

pounds — and was paying her proportion of the expenses of this tour in France, with the Great Exhibition as its main object. "*Sophronia!* Oh! . . . Oh! . . . *How* lovely!"

"My dear Georgy! Of course I recognise you," said Madame de Lamelle—(as she was more or less deciding to describe herself, by arrangement with Alfred and with the Minister of Police—no Frenchman could ever spell or pronounce "Lammle")—"Would you like to come in here, with or without your parents, and rest a little while? It is very hot outside. I can even give you a cold sorbet if you are thirsty——"

"Oh yes! Oh yes, I will," said the impulsive girl, who actually grew better looking as she gazed on the one woman who had ever called forth love in her soul. She was so determined that her parents—puffing very much—could only follow. Presently they were all comfortably seated in the ample *loge,* and a slight, but polite, introduction had been effected with the two Parisian assistants. One of these kindly saw to the ordering of a tray of sorbets and sponge biscuits. Mr. Podsnap, though still stupidly pompous, was becoming a little more reassured. Evidently this—this—woman spoke good French and was in a recognised position. Her dress was rather extraordinary, and much too short over the ankles, but it was a "costume," a word which at the present time and circumstances sanctified much.

Mme. de Lamelle, who was really getting quite clever at thought guessing, said to the puffing Mr. Podsnap:

"I dare say you are wondering all this time what has become of Alfred? Well, he was with me last week. He has worked very hard, poor fellow, since you and I last met, and his affairs, temporarily affected by the victory of the North over the South, have gradually got right again. You may have seen or heard something of him in London recently?" (Mr. Podsnap had

not, but bowed pompously.) "He has been there at intervals dealing with affairs and adjusting his own matters of business. But I am afraid we shall never be tempted back to England to live. The climate—is—really—well, there it is! However, I am now *much* interested in Pyrenean developments, and Alfred also. . . . Are you sure you won't come and have a meal with me at the restaurant? It is a little late for what the French call déjeuner; but we would go to the English restaurant, where you can have a regular British lunch at orthodox hours—half-past one? Come, Mr. Podsnap, a steak and bitters? I'm sure you're patriotic to a degree, and although you may prefer to drink wine at home, you would prefer British ale abroad . . . and floury potatoes? What do *you* say, Mrs. Podsnap?"

Mrs. Podsnap glanced at her husband's face, and seeing a yielding in it, turned with some graciousness, and replied: "Really, Mrs.—er—Lammle—it's very kind. We must confess to feeling rather strangers here, though they've made us very comfortable at our hotel—and—well, it *would* be pleasant to have a *real* English meal—not but what we haven't for years preferred French cookery at our home in London. It *would* be rather nice, and I'm sure our little girl would be enraptured."

Georgiana was already seated by Mme. de Lamelle, and looked up in her face and smiled. The Lamelle was a case-hardened creature. Georgiana was peaky and almost plain, but something about her unquestioning love that refused to regard or believe in any tarnish on the object of her affection had always, since their first meeting, pierced the elder woman's contemptuous, bitter nature.

"Well, then, I'll tell you what. You go a small round—don't go far away and get lost! Here is a card of mine; show that to any one of the attendants or police if you can't remember, and he will lead you back

here. I will go to my rooms and change. I look rather a figure of fun dressed up as a Pyrenean country-woman. Then I will be back here by one-thirty and take you out to lunch."

On these terms they parted for three-quarters of an hour. The Podsnaps, for fear of complications, lounged and sat quite near to the Rue de Paris in the Central Garden. At half-past one all four met again outside the Loge de Béarn, and Sophie took them over to the English section and ordered a thoroughly English lunch, and English beer for Mr. Podsnap; French wines for Mrs.; and lemonade for Georgy and herself.

After this the Podsnaps gradually became tiresome. They knew very few people in Paris, they went timidly on a few excursions to see other places in France, with a pursy guide, hired from the hotel, who took care they got an English diet as much as possible, and that they only saw what he thought it would be good for them to see. They were back in Paris again in the middle of August, halting for a day or two, preparatory to returning by way of Calais. Georgiana insisted on their writing to Mme. de Lamelle at the Exhibition, telling her they were back, and asking whether she could spare the time to go sight-seeing with them a little.

Sophie de Lamelle (who was beginning to think she really *was* Sophie de Lamelle) hardly knew what to say. She was touched a little at the thought of Georgy's devotion; but, after all, Georgy now had her separate fortune, and had grown up a little and asserted herself a trifle, so that her parents no longer so strongly controlled her horizon; Mr. Podsnap was becoming a trifle *ga-ga,* and his wife was also weakening, and, from her point of view, they didn't much matter whether they lived or died, though she was a little pleased to find that Georgy, so far, had escaped fortune-hunters in marriage.

However, she decided—to please Georgy—that she

would give them one day, or at any rate, one afternoon, before relegating them to the background of her mind.

The fact was—among other facts crowding into her life—she had made John Harmon's acquaintance at the *Exposition Universelle.* Whilst the Podsnaps were touring that portion of France which lay within six hours of railway travel round Paris, Harmon, having waited till the Exhibition buildings had grown relatively quiet from the attacks of Government personages and institutions, was going carefully through the products on the Champs de Mars which had to do with drugs and perfumes. He wished to see what relation they bore to the wares stocked by the remodelled firm of Harmon and Veneering; and was specially interested in the American drugs shown by a New York firm—Corness and Crabtree.

For reasons not very evident, possibly anticipatory, he had replaced the name of Veneering in the firm. It may be, with his strong sense of justice, he retained some regard for the attempts made along really novel lines by Veneering, between 1850 and 1864, to modernise medicine; and he really respected Mrs. Veneering, who had tried, between 1864 and 1867, to put order into their affairs, and whose father and father's capital had once stood as the main support of the firm. Some such reflections jointly moved him to do this; otherwise, he wished to have no more concerns in common with the disreputable Hamilton.

Harmon, also, at the Exhibition had been drawn to stare at the Loge de Béarn, and had become interested in its Pyrenean products. A blunder here, a shrewd guess there, had revealed to him in its principal keeper (Mme. Sophie de Lamelle), the "Sophronia Lammle," who had made a brief sensation in second-rate London as the clever wife of an unscrupulous "financier." He had even seen her in the London of the early 'sixties on some one or other occasion; but it was little more

than chance and righteous inquisitiveness which revealed her again in the altered and improved personage charged with a French location in the Great Exhibition.

"How do you do—er—Mrs. Lammle?" he said to her one day—one very hot day—in August.

"I am very well, thank you, Mr., Mr. . . . Let me look at you *well*. . . . Mr. Rokesmith. . . . No! I'm wrong there—Mr. Harmon? That's it; Mr. Harmon, formerly Mr. Boffin's secretary. I remember everything now, though much of it dates from eighteen sixty-two, sixty-three. But, of course, as John Harmon I have heard much of you, so, also, has my husband; Alfred, you know. He, by the bye, has gone away recently to a cooler place than this! At least an airier place. Why don't I go? Because I'm bent on keeping a contract. Such a rare feature in one's character nowadays, isn't it?"

"But I didn't know," he answered, "you were so interested—and I am sure so competently interested—in the Pyrenees. Shows how ignorant we all are! I've been hanging about this Exhibition some three weeks, and have often glanced at this delightful lodge, and have approved your very practical way of illustrating its contents. I rather fancy you know Mrs. Veneering—at a place near Calais? I dare say she has told you I have taken over her husband's drug house in Mincing Lane? I always had somewhat of an interest in drugs and medicines, and I believe they have a great future before them. *Must* be interested in something, don't you know! And there is such a respectability about drugs! Yes, and what most people don't realise, such a romance. I believe we are going to heal every one of their pains and distraught minds—in time."

"Are you? How nice. The only drug I believe in, to any extent, is money. If you could set up *every one* with an income of not less than £200 a year nearly all sin, sorrow, and ill-health would be swept away."

"I wonder if it would? I think the more certain path is along the line of medicines. I've been looking at Corness and Crabtree's show. Quite novel. But how we grope! I see that apparently you have two very capable-looking assistants. Would it be irreverent to ask you out to have a cup of tea?"

"No. It would not. Though if my friends here had not perfectly angelic dispositions, they might think so; for I am rather often away from my stall."

(Here she conversed for a moment with her two costumed Parisiennes, who smilingly acquiesced in what she said.)

"Now I am free, but if you are going to give me tea at any distance, I think I had better change out of my Béarnais costume——"

"Will it matter? And as regards place, I don't mind how near, so long as the tea, coffee, or chocolate is drinkable. You are better able than I am to choose the place, and if *you* have chosen it *you* cannot complain. Where we are at present is as hot as Africa in the hottest season."

She issued from the Loge de Béarn and led him through this court and that garden to a charming retreat behind the British section. It was purposely not made known—as a tea-room—though no respectable-looking person would be questioned. Still, it was intended more for persons connected with the Exhibition or frequenting it for business purposes rather than mere sight-seeing. Here you might sit in relative quiet and have a real English tea, so far as such an institution existed in 1867, before "afternoon tea" was definitely born and named.

Sophie ordered the meal. It came; but before it arrived they were already busy talking. John had begun by commenting on his experiences as a season-ticket holder, and how tiresome at first he had found the gatemen; not because he was English, but because

he spoke French too well, in their opinion, "pour un Anglais."

"Yes," said Sophie, "the admission at the gates and the money-taking are not bright specimens of French management. At first—in April—they put at each 'tourniquet' two cash-takers and season-ticket inspectors. As regards the cash-crowds, one man took your frank, the other raked it towards him and let it fall into the slit of a box whilst he released the catch of the turnstile. Then there seemed to grow up a—a—sort of collusion between the two gatemen, and they contrived to pocket and divide a considerable proportion of the admission money. Do you like your tea poured out straight away?"

"Straight away, please, if it has been made by English hands, as I take it this has, since there is no maddening silver net hung to the spout to catch tea leaves. . . . And so I suppose they stuck on gendarmes or soldiers with bayonets?"

"Yes. Something like it. When I heard, I said, 'Why don't you advertise for twin-brother couples, and stick one couple at each gate? Brothers seldom agree. However, they first put a sergent de ville to watch each *un*brotherly couple of gatemen. Then these couples squared the sergent de ville. . . . This lettuce is delicious! Won't you have some?"

"Thanks, I will. What an odd, delightful, and untimely meal. I have always craved for tea in the afternoon. I've eaten three of these sugar cakes already. Well, what was—what is the final result about the money-taking, and why are season-ticket holders like myself so scrutinisingly watched? I feel like a criminal each time."

"Well, the final result is what you see; a small army of officials—sergents de ville and gendarmes at each entrance, except, of course, those reserved for the *per-*

sonnel, which is where *I* generally come in. Have you finished your tea?"

"All except the last cup. I shall drink this slowly. And let's talk about drugs. They are my main subject of interest nowadays, since I bought up Veneering's business."

"You married Bella Wilfer, of course?"

"I married Bella—of course—and love her as I thought I could never love any one——"

"There is rather an odd person just now in Paris, who calls herself 'Susie Wilbraham.' . . . Is she your wife's sister? The police are inquiring about her. . . . She's come here from Baden-Baden, where she won quite a lot of money—in company—aren't things *amazingly* mixed?—in company with Veneering, a man we have both of us known in London—a former M.P."

"Yes. I know much about Susie, and as I hate telling a lie, I admit she is my wife's sister. I also know nearly as much about Veneering; in fact, as you know, I have bought up his business in London. His name is still kept in the firm, partly because I have a regard for his wife—her father was the senior partner. . . . But don't let us talk about these horrid people. I'm sorry you—or the Paris police—got to know about Susie. I wish to God she'd gone out to the colonies. . . . The Wilfers had more children than could be properly placed——"

"My dear Mr. Harmon! Don't distress yourself about *my* knowing! I know a great deal. Whatever I know or can do, I have no malice against *you*. You have asked me one or two leading questions, I am sure with no desire to injure me, nor even out of idle curiosity. I did not answer them, but I have them at the back of my mind. I am managing the stall, this 'lodge' as they call it, exhibiting Béarnais products, industries, and so on, but—you need not look surprised!—I was

never in Béarn in my life. Yet I have really become so interested in the Pyrenees I think I shall go there when the Exhibition is finished and shut up."

Harmon: "I don't know that I am greatly surprised at anything. At any rate, I take things calmly. I am making a number of inquiries about vegetables producing valuable drugs. Some of them grow naturally in France, and are far more used than most doctors have any idea of. A region of particular importance in this respect lies on the slopes of the Pyrenees, between one thousand and five thousand feet. That is one reason why I have been staring at your *loge* and its counters and shelves for weeks past. I think I've already told you I have bought up Veneering's business in Mincing Lane. I have studied drugs to some extent in South Africa; and Veneering himself—though, somehow, in the idiotic West End and in Parliament he got the reputation of a fool—was really, at one time, quite a smart person about drugs. He helped to found the cultivation of the cinchona tree in India; and, although he failed, it was more through the dunder-headed stupidity and lofty—what shall I say?—lack of interest in botany?—of the Anglo-Indian officials, than through climate, soil, or natives being unsuitable. But there it is. He himself seems either to have gone to pieces or to have taken up a side of affairs which does not at all agree with me. . . . Now, you positively MUST let me pay for what we've had, or I'll never come out with you again."

Sophie was quite placid about his paying, and promised to make all the inquiries she could as to the list of Pyrenean medicine plants he left with her; where they might be found, and how their seed could be obtained. She was further to find out and transmit a list of names of resident scientific men—doctors chiefly—who were interested in Pyrenean botany, and with whom John Harmon could correspond.

The afternoon of August 20 was the time fixed for her last meeting with the Podsnaps, an engagement yielded rather reluctantly by Sophie; but Georgy was so insistent and her lower lip so trembling at the prospect of a refusal, that she consented. Mr. Podsnap had hired a carriage from his hotel because he confessed himself to be feeling very tired. Yet, out of characteristic obstinacy, he would not allow Georgy to go off with her Sophronia, nor would Mrs. Podsnap leave him. So they drove pompously round a small circle of celebrated buildings, at no great distance from the heart of Paris. Then, in a change of mood, Mr. Podsnap dismissed the carriage at the Place Vendôme, and said, after taking ices or a cup of coffee at a restaurant, they would walk back to the hotel. They were to have some vague sort of tea-supper afterwards, not a regular dinner, as they had packed up most of their clothes, and would be leaving the next morning early. He seemed, for him, unusually flushed—overtired, had occasional lapses of memory.

"Why don't you go back now?" said Sophie. "I'm sure you have done quite sufficient sight-seeing."

"Not at all! This—ah—this—er—Column—interests me greatly . . . and—ah! . . . I think an oration of some kind is—er—being delivered from the summit. No. I shall enjoy the quiet walk back. It will do me good in the dusk."

They sat at the café and ate ices and drank coffee at rather an odd hour—about seven, sunset-time. It was a glorious evening, after a very hot day. Even Sophie de Lamelle—and she had enough Puckishness in her to impose this absurd name on the stolid Podsnaps—even Sophie felt a little sentimental over the sunset and the splendour of Paris. And the Podsnaps were going away (thank goodness!) to-morrow morning, and it was rather nice to be once more regarded by them with favour and even a certain respect. . . . But her mus-

ings were broken into by this elderly man. We must now, it seemed, all look at the remarkable column. It dated from the beginning of that century, at the very height of Napoleon's glory, and at the summit was a statue of the great Emperor recently re-erected (after many intervening vicissitudes) by his nephew, the Emperor Napoleon III. Mr. Podsnap, after reading rather disjointedly several sentences from the guide-book, rose and offered his arm to Mrs. Podsnap—a little sleepy and very tired—and insisted on leading her up to the vicinity of this column to examine it in detail. Sophie and Georgy followed them, exchanging smiles. Sophie, indeed, very nearly seized this moment to make her excuses and leave them to walk or drive back to their hotel. She was thoroughly tired of their company—but the look on Georgy's face of intense happiness somehow touched her, and with a little sigh she decided just to wait the actual setting-in of darkness and then either escort them to the Meurice Hotel, at no great distance, or say good-night and good-bye, and leave them to their fate; they could surely not make any great mistake in finding their way to the Meurice, supposing they were too tiresomely economical not to drive thither in another *fiacre*? . . . Mr. and Mrs. Podsnap, after walking arm-in-arm, were now standing a little apart, staring up at—not the statue; it was not the statue that was attracting so much attention from a growing crowd, but a gesticulating young man, wearing a very tall chimney-pot hat, standing by the side of the stone Napoléon. Faint, shrill fragments of his utterance reached their ears. To Mrs. Podsnap, who gazed up as if hypnotised, his words meant nothing; to Sophie they did not mean much—apparently an address to Napoléon. Georgy was much amused. "He's making a speech to the Emperor's statue! Oh, what delightfully unreasonable people they are."

"I wonder how Mr. Podsnap takes this?" said, half

to herself, their somewhat impatient guide. But Mr. Podsnap was no longer easily to be seen. Perhaps he had walked round to the other side of the column.

Mr. Podsnap had, in fact, found himself before this point alongside a very smartly-dressed young woman of decided good looks. He did not notice the clever make-up, being too dazed, and the sunset light being too embellishing. He looked at her several times . . . surely such a face was English, not French? She returned his glances boldly, but not impudently; and presently said in the most English English: "Eccentric beings, aren't they?"

Mr. Podsnap, if this had happened in England, would have answered by a slight, very haughty bow, and have walked away, unless satisfied that the unintroduced lady was a peeress. But being abroad, and unconsciously very home-sick, he replied with gallantry: "*Most* eccentric—I—ah—cannot distinguish what he is saying. Is it a public address? Surely a little dangerous from such a height, for I observe there—ah—is no paling——"

"I think he's a loony," said the lady. "Don't like to look any longer. . . . Makes me sick. My Victoria is waiting over there. . . . Can I take you back to your hotel?"

Mr. Podsnap—he really did not know why, he was so *very* tired, and Eunice and Georgy would have Madame de Lamelle as guide—but he really didn't know why—followed the lady to her Victoria and got in—and almost seemed to go to sleep in the short drive.

"Wake up!" she was saying presently, and rather crossly. He pulled himself together with a start. Perhaps he had had a touch of the sun. . . . This wasn't the Hotel Meurice, but for the moment he had forgotten all about the Hotel Meurice. . . . Perhaps? . . . Perhaps they were back in England?

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The tension of this waiting acted exceptionally on Mme. de Lamelle's nerves. It must—from the sky and the lit lamps—be half-past seven. She had no dinner engagement, but she wanted a quiet evening to compose some notes for Mons. Charlevoix's reading. She had better say a short good-bye to Mrs. Podsnap and to Georgy and leave them to find their way back to their hotel; or if they were such idiots that they could neither walk there alone nor get into a *fiacre* and drive there, well, she could rapidly escort them to the door and then take a *fiacre* herself to Passage Bosquet. Probably not five minutes covered this lapse of time since they had left the pavement table of the café, their ices, and coffee. Very likely Mr. P., being tired, had walked back to the hotel. She advanced with the clinging Georgiana and touched Mrs. Podsnap on the arm. Really she had been nearly lost to them in the increasing crowd of heat-weary, sensation-hungry people, all staring upward at the gesticulating figure talking to Napoleon. Three sergents de ville and an official or two had been for some time trying to force open the door leading up the inside stairs. . . . Evidently the mad orator had locked this against them before he climbed up. . . . There was an ominous silence as they desisted—heated, angry, puzzled. They had sent for stronger implements amid a silence only broken by the faint "yap! yap!" of the madman.

Suddenly, while Sophie was remonstrating with Mrs. Podsnap, there arose shriek upon shriek. The spokesman on the monument summit had raised his tall hat to the Emperor's statue by which he had been standing and had then (for there was no railing) leapt into the air, to fall with a sickening thud on the stones, a hundred and forty feet below. His head, as the body crashed down, parted with the encircling hat and was smashed to fragments.

Sophie's first thought was for Georgiana, the grown-up child who had never before seen any episode of horror; but Georgiana took things much more sensibly than any one might have foreseen. Merely saying, "*How* horrible! *How* horrible," she rushed to her prone mother who, of course, had swooned heavily and was all aflop on the paving. The crowd about them gesticulated, shrieked, yowled, howled, and swayed to and fro, evading the rushing figures of the police. Sophie and Georgy lifted Mrs. Podsnap to her feet, and Sophie hissed into her ears: "You *must* command yourself; otherwise they may claim you as a witness in the courts. You *must return now* with your daughter to the hotel where, no doubt, your husband is waiting for you, and then go to bed." Between the two of them they directed her faltering steps out of the crowd into quieter streets, and so to the hotel entrance. "Il y a eu un suicide du sommet de la Colonne Vendôme," said Sophie, in a quiet voice which still shook, to the decorous hotel staff. Otherwise they might have thought that Mrs. Podsnap was inebriated.

"Madame et Mademoiselle l'ont vu, et Madame en est toute bouleversée comme vous la voyez. Elle est très malade. Conduisez-la à son appartement pendant que je retrouve son mari."

Then she went to the concierge at the entrance. But he had seen no entrance of Monsieur Podsnap, who had departed early in the afternoon in one of the hotel carriages. Mme. de Lamelle stamped her foot with vexation. *What* could have become of him? And why, oh, *why*, had she been fool enough to get mixed up with the Podsnaps once more! They were to have returned to England the next day!

In her distraction she thought of John Harmon. . . . Where was he staying? She took out her little notebook from a hidden pocket. Yes! How fortunate!

Here was his address. *What* luck! Hotel Meurice! Actually here.

"Vous connaissez M'sieur Jean Harmon?" she asked the imperturbable hall porter.

He replied with an added shade of consideration: "*Si* je le connais? J'crois bien—un monsieur *très* distingué."

"Alors tout va mieux, car M'sieur Harmon a une certaine connaissance avec ces gens infortunés, ces Podsnap. Faites demander s'il est chez lui, car alors——"

But Mr. Harmon had gone out half an hour or an hour ago, to dine—the valet of his rooms thought—with a French minister "détenu à Paris par les affaires." That meant that his return might not take place till—eleven, twelve o'clock. Still, to know he was staying *here* lifted a huge weight off Sophie's mind.

She told the hall porter the bare circumstances of the case—their assembling round the Colonne Vendôme, the suicide of the mad orator—Mr. Podsnap's disappearance.

He was, of course, shocked to learn of the suicide, and fully realised the upset of the elder lady. As to the gentleman, he was calm. M'sieur Podsnap would turn up in good time. (He had known of so many similar disappearances and returns and had learnt "qu'avec les Anglais il ne fallait pas les prendre au tragique.")

"Du reste, il y a encore le temps. Cette famille très-respectable ne quitterait l'hotel avant huit heures du matin. . . . Madame devait s'accalmer. . . . Le suicide. . . . Ça, c'etait horrible. . . . Pas à douter. . . . Et Madame. . . . Madame était Anglaise? Madame avait agi avec enormément de savoir faire en remportant tout-de-suite Mme. Podsnap et Mademoiselle. . . . Autrement, avec la police, l'on ne savait jamais . . . *quels* embarras," etc.

Sophie went up to the Podsnap suite and asked to see Mademoiselle. Georgy came out on tiptoe into their

sitting-room. "Ma's gone to sleep. I only hope I didn't give her *too* much laudanum; but she seems sleeping naturally. . . . But *what* are we to do? Do you think poor Pa's been murdered? And he's got the tickets, and most of the money!"

"My dear," said Sophie, "look here. You're far more of a sensible little thing than I ever thought you. You behaved splendidly when that poor creature threw himself off the tower on to the ground. With your careful, cotton-wool bringing-up, I didn't know *for one second* what you mightn't do. All else will come right, believe me. It is *everything* you and your poor mother are safe back here, in this comfortable hotel. *What* does it matter if you don't go home to-morrow? You can always telegraph to Portman Square. Now, listen carefully to what I am saying. I shall send word to an acquaintance—I might almost say friend—of mine who is living in this hotel, Mr. John Harmon. Your mother—perhaps even you—have heard of him at home. He was once Mr. Boffin's secretary, but came into heaps and heaps and heaps of money. He is out dining to-night, but he will get my letter as soon as he comes back. I must go now to my rooms in Passage Bosquet. But on the way there I shall inform the police, and I expect your father will return all right during the night. He may have lost his way, or said something to your mother she did not hear. But you will be all *much* too tired and upset to go to-morrow morning. So we'll telegraph. I'll be round here quite early in the morning—and you'll get home the next day. . . . You're a dear—sensible—little thing."

* * * * *

When Susie Wilbraham found herself saddled with a plethoric, elderly Englishman who was not merely vinous—as she had at first supposed—but ill, dazed, cracky, she said: "Well! I *have* been a blooming idiot." It would be ghastly if he died in her flat. At

any cost he must be got rid of. She and her maid, under one pretext and another, searched gingerly in his pockets, but they could light upon no evidence of his address in Paris. So the maid—a German from the frontier, able to talk Alsatian French as well as some English—went off to the nearest police station and told an elegant version of Susie's interference with Mr. Podsnap's movements—a poor Englishman, or at least one seemingly well-to-do—they themselves had not liked to make any examination of his pockets.

These statements were taken at their approximate value. Susie was evidently a lady of uncertain morals, but not, so far, well known to the Paris police; she had a discreet maid and a sufficiency of money. Mr. Podsnap was now quite light-headed, but very sleepy; he was borne off to a quiet ward at the police station, and by two in the morning a messenger arrived from the headquarters of the arrondissement and the identification was assured. In a semi-comatose state he was discreetly returned to the Hotel Meurice about four a.m.

Poor Georgiana, who had been sitting up, and often crying, was very much relieved, still more so when she found she had not given her mother *too* strong a dose of laudanum, but that she was easily awakened and ready to devote herself to her sick husband. At about half-past four a.m. an extremely agreeable and very nice-looking gentleman, Mr. John Harmon, had sent in his card, and in a whispered conversation had assured Miss Podsnap of his sympathy and readiness to help. The Podsnaps' stay in Paris might have to be prolonged till her father was quite himself again; but nothing else need disturb her—it was a mixture of sunstroke, over-sight-seeing, a foreign diet. . . . Her father, if left in perfect quiet, would soon be himself again, and her mother also. A clever English doctor should see to them both, and with him present Miss Podsnap need not take on herself the responsibility of administering

any further doses of laudanum to her mother, though on this occasion she had acted with remarkable wisdom and judgment. Mrs. Harmon, his wife (he reminded her), had dined with Miss Podsnap's parents prior to her marriage—several years ago. . . . Altogether the little event was turning out most happily, and now the plucky, but greatly tried young lady, must go to bed and sleep well, and no doubt her friend, Mme. de Lamelle, would look in on her during the morning. So a sobbing, but greatly relieved and fortified Georgy did, indeed, retire to bed with a thankful heart, and slept steadily till ten a.m. the next morning, when her much-loved Sophie appeared just as a breakfast tray came in.

The ten days which followed were quite the happiest Georgy had so far passed in her life. Her father was mildly ill and unable to order her about; the intervention of one so rich and vouched for as "M'sieur 'Armon," said to have a fortune in London—property vouched for at three hundred thousand pounds—definitely established the respect felt at the hotel for the Podsnaps; and John Harmon's acquaintance with Mme. de Lamelle accounted and vouched for *her*. Georgiana was therefore able to find her way, every day, to the Great Exhibition, and to sit and work with Sophie in her Loge de Béarn. She was even able to pretend afterwards, in their section of London Society, that she had been an employée of the French Exhibition; and certainly, in this month of France, she had learnt—and retained—more French than had ever come to her before. She seemed even to grow in actual size—perhaps truly became stouter, stronger, less insignificant. In her enthusiasm she, with pantings, proposed to Sophie that she should link her lot with that of the Lamelles (she revelled in the French version of the name, and would swallow any legend to account for it).

But this Sophie would not agree to. "I have a lot to do yet, my child, before I am free. It is all like one of

those rather foolish fairy stories you are beginning to read. But I see—I *do* see a light at the end of the overgrown avenue, a day coming—possibly—when I shall have saved enough money to live on—to live a *nice* life on—and *then* if your parents don't want you and you don't marry—but I dare say you'll be married *long* before then—you shall come and live with me—if you care to live abroad——"

"*If* I care!" Georgy would reply. "I *hate* England. I always want to live abroad——"

"Ah, you don't know! England is a lovely country for rich people, and well-born people, people in your station of life; it is only cruel to people like me——"

"And Alfred—if I may call him so—and Mr. Lammle—I—I—mean Monsieur de Lamelle."

"No, dear. I won't encourage you to be silly. My name is really Lammle, though over here the spelling seems so to confuse them that I have gradually slid into 'Lamelle——'"

"Well, why not stick to it? Especially if you don't want to go back to horrid old England."

"Perhaps I shall. However, we need not bother about that now. You go back with your parents to London and try to meet there with some thoroughly good and sufficiently well-off young man you really could like, and who would appreciate and like you. Marry him and have children. Then some day we shall meet again. But don't throw yourself away. I dare say, in a year or two, business of mine or of Alfred's will call me to England, and I will call and see you. Later on, if you don't marry, or don't feel happy at home—well—perhaps we might live together for a while—travel together——"

Through the police, through the recovered Podsnap, through other feelers, John Harmon realised that his sister-in-law was living in Paris—with some discre-

tion; that it was she who had picked up the "lost" Mr. Podsnap and given him refuge, when he was very unwell, and handed him over to a discreet Chef de Police. Indeed, before they departed from Paris, Mrs. Podsnap and Georgiana had made their way in a carriage to Susie's address and left cards of thanks and an assurance that Mr. P. was now sufficiently recovered to be returning home. But John also found his way to the rooms of an at first defiant, and later a cowed sister-in-law, and had intimated that if she definitely joined the Legion of the Lost in Paris life, did not, in fact, clear out of France at once, he could make her position there very unpleasant. He was determined to save her from the life she had marked out for herself, partly in ignorance of what the life of a woman of pleasure, especially a foreign woman of pleasure, was in Paris, in those days. He acted so powerfully on her feelings that before he returned to England, to his now anxious and entreating Bella, he had secured her starting with nearly all her three thousand pounds for New Zealand, to join (whether or not they liked it) the household of her brother John. John Wilfer, by now, had married his Grete and was "getting on fine." Harmon had helped him, so the news of his sister Susie coming out at Harmon's advice was at first hardly a blow. In all probability, with her modest dowry, she would soon be snapped up by a spouse. No doubt she was. So John Harmon, having seen Susie off at Marseilles in torrid heat on a steamer which, through its Red Sea connections, would transfer her to New Zealand, at length and very thankfully and relievedly joined his Bella at their house on the verge of Cavendish Square; and Bella showed much kindness to Georgy Podsnap.

CHAPTER VII

AFTER THIRTEEN YEARS

IN June, 1880, Mervyn Veneering came over from Calais to London to commence work at the great drug house of Harmon, Veneering and Co. This was in accord with John Harmon's plans and his promises to Mervyn's mother. She—Annie Veneering—still lived at Villa les Acacias on the outskirts—the phrase was now more than ever true—of Calais. Only the canal now separated this pleasant spot with fields, orchards, and garden from inclusion in the suburbs of the modern town.

But the garden was luxuriant and well ordered. Mrs. Veneering had, during the last fourteen years, gradually improved her financial position, with John Harmon to help her. She had saved enough money to buy from the long absent *propriétaire* the freehold of the villa and its garden and field, and had a little increased the enclosed land round it till it amounted, in all, to a superficies of three hectares—which, in her letters home, she proudly translated into six acres. The sale of the produce of the land added to her four hundred a year, raised her annual income by degrees to six hundred—seven hundred pounds. Her husband, when he stayed at the villa, contributed to its expenses. They now took in no more lodgers or paying guests, and Mrs. Veneering gave more and more attention to her poultry farm, vegetables, and fruit trees. She sold all the produce not needed for their own sustenance, and even, in the late 'seventies, had a subsidiary farmlet near Marquise, which sent its ducks and chickens across

the Channel to be sold in London. Her daughter, Jeanne, helped her vigorously in all this and spoke French like an educated Frenchwoman.

Annie Veneering must have been about forty-seven in 1880. An open-air life in northern France, since 1865, had greatly improved her health and stamina. In 1869, she had become a Roman Catholic, after a spell of unusual "tryingness" on the part of her husband. But she had, of course, no intellectual guard against the more diffuse forms of religion, and Catholicism seemed to her an increasing satisfaction in her life of hard work, unwonted self-reliance, utter disappointment, and exile: an exile to which she was growing more and more reconciled. Indeed, it pleased her, in her middle-age, to trace her husband back to a Flemish origin. It seemed to make them completely respectable. There were actually Calais people of the name of Van Eering, only they were keepers of cabarets or fishermen.

Père Duparquet had been her good friend and trustworthy adviser. He had secured her conversion to Catholicism, and the baptism into the Roman Church of her youngest son, the frequently peevish Lancelot. Jeanne—as she was called on the French side—and Mervyn were stiffer propositions. They sometimes went to church with their mother; sometimes stayed away . . . committed themselves to no decided step, save that of heartily disliking the representatives of the Church of England abroad, a feeling only based on the remembrance of a once unsympathetic, hard-judging Anglican chaplain at Calais. Their very Bohemian father had been an unexpressed agnostic all his working life, except when an ambition to get into "Society" had sent him to church. Across the Channel he had disdained such aids to the building up of character.

In 1880, he was sixty years old, and feeling the effects of an after-life of prolonged dissipation, of

bounteous breakfasts, four-course luncheons, nips of brandy, cups of black coffee, French wines, Rhine wines, Italian wines, liqueurs, six-course dinners, and occasional petits soupers—and what not else?

"But surely, a chemist, a drug merchant, such as you make him out to have been——?"

He was less a chemist than a salesman, a commercial traveller, a promoter of 'cute ideas. He still belonged to the school that saw no serious harm in over-eating or in the drinking of wines and sipping of liqueurs to any extent your purse permitted, so long as you did not get drunk.

At sixty he began to have gout in various disguised forms, scarcely then recognised as gout. He had lost his sly love of women; but even had this appetency remained, he himself no longer possessed any sexual attractiveness. No decent-looking or decent-living woman would now surrender to his invitation without a financial inducement beyond his means. He still had a fine head of hair, oily with scented dressings; but its colour, in ten years, had passed from a rich black brown to a decided, though not uncomely, grey.

Mervyn being three months under eighteen when John Harmon's invitation to enter the service of the firm had reached and been accepted by his mother, and having hitherto never travelled across the Channel to his native land, it had been decided that he should be accompanied and seen to by his capable sister Jeanne. It seemed a little strange to Mrs. Veneering that Mr. Harmon, having interested himself in Mervyn from his youth up, should have sent him no invitation to stay either in Wigmore Street or in Gloucestershire at the start of his career; but there it was. Mervyn had got to reach London to present himself at the Mincing Lane office, and he could have few shrewder travelling companions than his elder sister who, at

twenty, had the wits and sobriety of a man of thirty. Jeanne had been twice to England with her mother, and understood all the intricacies of the Channel service.

The brother and sister directed their course to Charing Cross station. After much home discussion and consideration of Harmon's suggestions, it had been decided that Mervyn should continue his studies at King's College, Strand, to prepare for eventual entry into Cambridge. During the years of preparation, he would be working daily at the Mincing Lane house—his complete knowledge of French and his shorthand would be of great service to old Mr. Wilfer—and he could attend the College evening classes——

Jeanne and Mervyn, therefore, arrived one lovely morning in June. Even the surroundings of Charing Cross station looked relatively benign and innocent in the young sunlight. London, of course, got up later than Calais or any French town: so they decided they would not be in a hurry, but would breakfast at the restaurant and then look about them for suitable lodgings close by, somewhere not too far from King's College, or from the Underground which would take Mervyn, most days of the week, to the City.

The railway restaurant, in those days, was, of course, in very saddening contrast with things to eat and drink at Calais. Perhaps it was that which made the back of Jeanne's throat ache so, and her eyes so constantly fill with tears, as she watched Mervyn's profile, and thought how soon they would be separated. However, eight o'clock did not seem too early to look for lodgings. So leaving Mer's luggage in the cloak-room, they sallied forth into the sunlit street. Above an Old Curiosity Shop at the end of the street, long since altered in subsequent "improvements," was an inviting prescription: "Apartments To Let."

The proprietor and his wife—the latter with her hair

still in an iron-grey tangle, the hour of social refinement in Villiers Street not having struck—received them with a certain amazement. They resembled so little the usual clientèle of lodgers who succeeded each other in the tenancy of the two suites of apartments. Jeanne explained that her brother might like to see the rooms, as he was about to be enrolled as a student at King's College.

The proprietor's wife led them to the first floor, threw open doors and windows, and came down to discuss them intermediately with her husband. "A pair of innocents, if you'll believe me. Brother an' sister. 'E's goin' to be a schudent at King's an' says as 'e'll give a reference to some big City bloke, some name like 'Armon. She's a goin' back to 'er Ma in France, but wants to see 'er brother suited before she goes. . . . 'Ud like to go this evening," otherwise must put up at an 'otel. I vote we try 'em. It'll be a change after Polls as goes off with a quarter's rent due, or literary chaps as pleads with tears in their eyes they can't pay up."

So, when presently Mervyn and Jeanne came down and tried to look very cold and business-like and thought the rooms *might* suit, but Mervyn could only afford to pay—a little less than Mrs. Proprietor had named (this, with much inner trembling, Jeanne had decided was the *right* course), Mervyn was grumblingly accepted, told at any rate that it was a let for three months, to see how things worked, and on the understanding that much cooking was not to be expected from a very busy landlady. Then the luggage was brought over from the station and Jeanne unpacked for her dear boy. The furniture enraptured them; it was so old or so admirably feigned to be old.

The two rooms (and a lavatory outside on the landing) had served to house some of the best bits of the

Old Curiosity Shop. The windows opened westward, towards the station, and there was (if they had stopped to realise it) a frightful din, night and day, from rumbling trains and whistling, screaming engines; but they would also look towards the wonderful London sunset. Turn your head to the left and there was a glimpse of green foliage, and even a peep, two inches long, of the river.

Mervyn and Jeanne were enchanted with their luck —or was it not better than luck? Rattling good management. That's what Mervyn said Jeanne was to tell their tired, anxious mother when she was back home again, early the next morning. Then mother would let Jeanne come over other times to help Mervyn out of other difficulties.

"As pretty a pair as I've seen this many a day," said their landlady behind their backs as they walked out in the glaring sunshine to see something of London before the sad, inevitable parting, before Jeanne returned by the evening train and night steamer to Calais. "Well, it won't do us no 'arm to 'ave 'im for a bit after that 'Umphreys. I reelly felt the rooms wanted a disinfectant after *'e'd* gone. Even Miss Clements seemed proper then. And with this lad as lodger in the front suite we can change the furniture a bit easier when we want to."

Jeanne and Mervyn had spent most of that June morning gaily, rearranging both sitting-room and bedroom a little, just to establish a feeling of proprietorship. Then about one o'clock they decided—a little palpitating—to set out to lunch and to see London. They dared not ask the grim landlady to prepare them a meal so serious as lunch at short notice in the sitting-room; besides it would not have such a flavour of adventure, of taking up their citizenship. So they walked up Villiers Street to the Strand, the historic Strand,

crossed the Strand—quite a safe and easy thing to do then, with only horse-drawn buses and cabs to keep an eye on—and went to an attractive-looking restaurant in a side street leading to Trafalgar Square and well in view of the National Gallery. The lunch seemed heavy after the régime of Calais. Still it was wholesome and not expensive in their new English money, which Mervyn handled clumsily.

After that the National Gallery. But this—then—was ill-arranged and depressing—so much of Turner at his worst and an overdose of Landseer. They came out again and crossed to the south side of Cockspur Street, just as a Waterloo bus was stopping to put down passengers. Mervyn saw on it "Zoological Gardens." He gripped Jeanne by the arm and said decidedly "Let's get in here" : then to the conductor "You go to the Zoological Gardens. Isn't that so?" "That's so," said the conductor.

With his directions they found the Zoo and were enraptured. Then, south of that, the Royal Botanic, and were thrilled. Mervyn, for the reason of interest in Harmon, Veneering and Co. had already studied Botany, but Calais had little scope for exhibition and a visit to Brussels had only stimulated an interest which could never be slaked. However, here they had met with an obstacle which ended ever so pleasantly. It was not like the Zoo, where you came in by paying; and when they first presented themselves at a lodge the porter was very doubtful about admitting them. Had they been plain of feature he would have been adamant, but their good looks, innocence, and eager eyes softened his corrugated heart. He said he'd go and ask the Curator, since the lady was wanting to return to France that evening; and the Curator hearing, shyly mentioned, the magic name of John Harmon, not only admitted them but gave them tea on his private lawn after taking them through the more interesting

exhibits; and—with Mr. Harmon's recommendation to be obtained later—promised to put up Mervyn for membership.

Then they went out once more into a hard world—from water-lily-covered waters, swans and cygnets and gorgeous flower beds and a band—into dowdy Albany Street and caught another Waterloo bus which, by some magic, took them all the way to opposite the top of Villiers Street.

At the Old Curiosity Shop the grim landlady, hearing that Miss Veneering was purposing to return to Calais by the evening train, thought she might arrange an early mixture of tea and dinner, if Mr. Veneering would consider such as his last meal that day—so far as she was concerned. And at six, Jeanne and Mervyn sat down to a repast of well-grilled chops, new potatoes, well-made English tea and open jam tart. At eight o'clock that evening Mervyn, trying hard to remember he was nearly eighteen and almost a man, bade farewell to his sister outside a second-class compartment in the Continental train; and Jeanne tried to assume something of the mother—she was two years older—in her tone and to speak without a squeak or a gulp. But it was hard! And when various guards said "Stand aside, please!" and the train slowly moved, Jeanne could utter no words; only purse her pretty lips, and make dumb gestures of farewell.

Mervyn, for his part, felt equally near tears; but hardened as he re-entered Villiers Street. It was too early to go in and go to bed; to enter a theatre might be too venturesome before he had even slept a night in London; so he walked several times up and down the Strand to familiarise himself with the great City. Vicious faces looked into his, then turned away from his candid counter-glance, which did not even classify them as wicked. He felt a little bewildered, greatly puzzled, here and there interested in the still open shops;

and at last re-entered his Old Curiosity Shop under the frowning stare of the landlady—wearing a preposterous bonnet and looking like a caricature of prevailing fashions. She had either just come in or was just going out to renew her contact with Fashion. Timidly wishing her "Good-night," Mervyn went upstairs, lit his candle, and betook himself to bed.

The next morning after consulting with his landlady, he took the underground railway to Mark Lane and found himself utterly dazed with the City's roar and swiftly walking crowds. Policemen guided him from point to point till he stood in front of Harmon and Veneering's cheerful court in Mincing Lane. The sight of his own surname, there emblazoned, put courage and hope into him. The poor old dad, after all, had not perhaps been such a ghastly failure as he and Jeanne had thought him. He had once sat in Parliament, and although there had been a disturbing suggestion of a financial failure when he and Jeanne had been little children, that had seemingly passed away; and it was only health, or age, or disinclination which had prevented him from resuming his partnership in this glorious undertaking, this great attempt to co-ordinate and classify and chemically prepare for sick humanity's consumption the world's vegetable drugs.

He walked in, thrilled for once that he could reply "Veneering" when asked his name, and see the effect on the young deputy hall porter's face. And soon afterwards he was being warmly shaken hands with by kind old Mr. Wilfer, who almost seemed to have tears in his blue eyes as he repeatedly told him he was welcome. He had, of course, learnt something about the Wilfer history. The great partner, Mr. Harmon (Mr. Wilfer had declined to have his own name put into the business in place of Veneering's), was travelling just then: he very often went abroad for a short time on supreme drug business—just then he was in Sweden—but he

had left full instructions about Veneering's work and place in the business: he was to begin as Mr. Wilfer's private secretary.

A few days later, when he was feeling quite accustomed to London life and generally made his journeys to and from the office, in Mincing Lane, by river steamer (for the joy of the changing scenery and the visible history), he was seated eating his London breakfast preparatory to starting for his office work; the landlady threw open his sitting-room door with a gesture from the stage and exclaimed: "*Mist' Rarmon*"; and John Harmon walked into his room and stretched out a friendly hand to shake his.

"I returned last night from abroad and thought I would come over and find you here before I went down to Gloucestershire. Wilfer sent on your London address to my house in Wigmore Street. You're evidently a young man of some originality, boldly to take up your quarters in this region of banditti. I ought to have let your mother know I was starting off to Sweden and she could then have consulted some one else as to lodgings. However——"

"I really think this place is alright, Mr. Harmon. Somehow I like it. Jeanne actually decided on it and you may remember she makes up her mind very quickly. She said—amongst other things—that no one who traded in beautiful old furniture *could* be wicked. And then it is so splendidly near Charing Cross station. . . . And that's why—besides Mr. Wilfer's kindness—I haven't, so far, been *a bit* home-sick. I look across to the bridge and the trains and I always feel I could start off for Calais and home any morning or evening."

"Well, that's all right, I suppose," said Harmon, watching his eager eyes and catching the little click in the voice when the boy treated of "home." "At any rate I shall keep an eye on you and expect to play the heavy father if you get into difficulties. *I* had to face

life when I was four years younger than you, and a wholesome lad's own instincts are his best guides to companionship. You must come down and see us in the country a little later on. Wilfer has already expressed his approval of you. Now, if you've eaten all the breakfast you want, we might start off for the office together and talk as we go."

They walked to a river pier and shortly after arriving went on board a down-stream steamer.

In those days a fleet of small paddle steamers plied up and down the Thames between Richmond and Barking or some such place in the dock region. They may not have been so swift as the trains in the tunnels of the then choking underground railway, but they were infinitely pleasanter in fine weather. Harmon was colossally rich—or thought to be—for those days, but he kept most of his carriages and coachmen down in the country and only one brougham in London for going out at night. Although now a man of forty-eight or forty-nine, he was fond of walking when time permitted, of walking about London. It kept him spare of figure, observant of great and little things. The omnibuses of those days were still repulsive: crowded, smelly, and fleaey inside, and singularly uncomfortable outside; the cleaner and more spacious trams were not allowed to penetrate north of Westminster and Blackfriars bridges or south of Clerkenwell. Probably the Metropolitan Board of Works still governed London, and with its soul of a successful builder hated assistance to the general public or anything but a pettifogging parish policy. Happily, as John Harmon said, the river steamers still persisted, though (as John Harmon described to Mervyn) the underground railway management and the omnibus companies were agitating to have them removed or decried.

Harmon, during the quarter of an hour's swirl down

the Thames to the Mark Lane landing-place, told Mervyn he had been elected to Parliament for Tewkesbury at the last general election, a few months previously, and he was hoping, if only Mr. Gladstone could be kept off cutting down the Empire and abandoning Candahar, some bold new policy in regard to London and its proper government might be inaugurated. "Our public education is shockingly bad, wildly inappropriate to the last quarter of the nineteenth century; and the government of London is simply inchoate—if you know what that word means."

In August of that year came about Mervyn's first visit to the Harmons' house in Gloucestershire. "If it *is* in Gloucestershire," said his host as they were driving over the Severn bridge. "I think the house is in Worcestershire and the gardens are in Gloucester: something of that kind. I had a kind of idea my grandfather came from these parts; and then the situation just suited my plans for a sweet home in the country, close to water power, and with experimental gardens for growing at least a third of the drugs we use. We have one of the best climates in England here, in the Lower Severn valley; we are in or near the loveliest scenery; the western counties are packed with history—the Romans—by Jove!—were no fools. *They* knew good country when they saw it, and thought much more of Wales than did the Anglo-Saxons. At the same time, as you must already know, these—round about me here—are not our only herb gardens. For some things that like the chalk soil we have the hundred acres near Lee on the Eltham Road, managed, you remember—you've seen them?—from the house at Lee Green where the Boffins lived. . . . But I am afraid we shall have to give that up: it is getting so crowdingly built over round about, and the air is be-

coming so smoky. Then, of course, there is the French place that I got through Mrs. Lammle—or Madame de Lamelle as she calls herself—in the Pyrenees. You must go *there* in one of your holidays. To me—and thank goodness they seem to be to you—these properties, these experiments in cultivation are of the most thrilling interest. Can't *think* why they don't seem to be so to my boys—Reggie and John! I believe their public schools have given them the idea that there is something 'low' about a druggist's business; whereas it is full of romance and uplifting. Your father had a glimpse of that in the 'fifties, but the pursuit of politics pulled *him* down."

"Poor old Dad. I have never quite been able to make him out, Mr. Harmon, since I dared to form opinions about any one. Jeanne, who is so sweet to most people, seems hard about him. He certainly takes no interest in botany now; at least, in his travels about Europe he doesn't seem to go to botanical gardens or museums or—or—drug manufactories. . . . Yet his name is in our business. I always think *that* ought to make him proud——"

"Well, perhaps some day it may be *your* name; that's what you must work for. And if you work, I shan't fail you in encouragement. P'raps when the two boys have got through their wretched public schools, where they seem to learn nothing of reality or importance, except games and bad language, they may come to see the tremendous interest of drugs, of vegetable chemistry, of the possible mastery over all diseases. . . . Sanders, there's something wrong with that mare's ears, inside 'em; I mean, some beastly burrowing grub or beetle——"

"She's bin like that, Sir, ever since she came back from the fields. I'll take her into the vet. at Tewkesbury, one of these days."

"Better bring her round to me to-morrow morning.

I know as much about beasts and their ailments as most vets. . . . And that isn't much," said Harmon, turning with a laugh to Mervyn.

They had arrived. Chacely Priory, which had been a flourishing establishment in the Middle Ages, had been laicised in Henry VIII.'s reign for the greed of some courtier, and had figured somewhat in English history as the abode of three spendthrift, rakish families down to the beginning of the nineteenth century. Then it had somehow come down in the world, and had even become, they said, a farmhouse in William IV.'s reign. A Bristol manufacturer had retired there in 1840, and had horribly vulgarised it. His son had over-spent and over-drunk and over-married; and John Harmon had bought the place and much added land in 1870, just in time to save it from a worse fate; from being turned into a manufactory of something useful but unpleasant, based on the water power of the hill streams behind it, westward, and the Severn, two or three miles to the east.

Harmon, prospecting in this region for traces of his ancestry, and still more for the site of a possible great herb garden, had thought Chacely Priory a very good place to live and work at. With his growing-up family of two boys and three girls he wanted a real home in the country, sufficiently far away from London. His last child, Helen—Helen Stansfield, after his almost forgotten mother—had been born there. "I'm the only one of us," she was already saying, "who isn't a Cockney."

The house in Wigmore Street had been turned very much into a museum of samples and a place for study, affording just enough accommodation to John for his business as a drug merchant and a member of Parliament, and to Bella for brief visits to London in the spring and autumn.

Bella had grown to hate the great City, especially

during the close of the 'sixties, when Cecilia out at Hornsey, Reggie the racing tout, and even the thoroughly, ferociously respectable Lavvy at Fulham, had become, or were tending to become, compromising or vexatiously boring and clamorous. Wealth, however, can do everything, and do most things respectably. John, her husband, had smoothed over the difficulties of odious Cecilia and her crack-brained husband, and persuaded them to emigrate to Tasmania or some other distant but healthy part of the British Empire, where he gave them a thousand pounds to buy a chemist's business; and a somewhat similar transaction had sent Reggie away from the trampled race-courses and the Birmingham betting centres to British Columbia. Susan, they hoped, might never leave New Zealand, where she had married a few years since for the third time.

And as to John, of Opotiki, in the North Island of Antipodial Britain: he was now a man of forty-five, happily married, father of a large family, owner of twelve thousand acres, active and successful in his search for native drugs, and a sort of agent in that far-off region for his brother-in-law's City firm of Harmon and Veneering. John and Lavvy, in fact, were the only members of the Wilfer family, besides Bella, who had turned out satisfactorily. The one thing they could hope for in regard to the others was that they had been shipped to a sufficient distance (at great expense) never to return or cause any more bother.

Chacely Priory faced southward in its imposing aspect, and from its terraced garden you had satisfying views of the broad Severn, sliding down through meadows, woods, and ancient villages towards Gloucester. From the northern side of the house, Tewkesbury houses and cedars and the junction of Avon and Severn were visible, beyond clusters of trees, snug vil-

lages, and farmhouses. The ground about the beautiful old house and its large-windowed chapel—now the middle drawing-room, the chief sitting-room of the family—was divided into terraces and lawns for flowers, croquet and tennis; and there was a large field for cricket. But beyond these and a small village for out-door servants and gardeners, there were experimental gardens planted with innumerable drug-yielding plants. Here and there was the glint of glass, revealing, if you studied details, long rows of greenhouses. But all the experimental, businesslike, practical portion of the estate was so arranged as not to be too conspicuous to the eye of a fantastic landscape lover, especially in the views seen from both sides of the house. In a lesser drawing-room, seated behind a tea-table and reading a book, was his host's wife, the "Bella" of whom Mervyn had heard so much. She gave her left hand to her husband to kiss and her right to Mervyn, and then introduced her three daughters, Hetty, Lizzie, and Helen. Hetty must have been about sixteen, on the borderline between girlhood and womanhood, Lizzie—he afterwards learnt—was eleven, and Helen nine. They had really stayed in and protracted their tea, away from the rather noisy rest of the party, out of sheer curiosity: what was Mervyn Veneering going to be like? Mervyn divined this and felt unusually shy and gawky. But his host boldly took the course of alluding to him as "Mervyn" and leading them to infer that, on the way over from Tewkesbury, they had discussed much business concerning the firm's policy. John Harmon sat by Bella as he talked and tea'ed, and Bella kept kind eyes on Mervyn's awkward movements and blushing cheeks. The three girls plied him with nice things to eat without undue attention or awkward overplus on plate. And the shyness wore off, especially when Harmon said, "You're all much of an age, seems to me, and had better begin

and end with Christian names. This, Mervyn," encircling her slim waist with an arm, "is Hetty—don't forget—Arabella Henrietta, after her two grandmothers, so to speak—her real grannie, my Bella's mother, and her adopted grannie, dear old Mrs. Boffin; and this—put down the cake and come along here, miss, to be properly explained—this is Lizzie, otherwise Elizabeth Harmon, duly named after one of the sweetest and best women we have ever known—Mrs. Wrayburn; and this last with the turn-up nose and saucy eyes—we are all hoping the nose will grow up in the middle—is Helen, named after my poor mother. For nine years we have fought against the tendency to call her 'Nellie': Helen is a beautiful name, and you must never call her anything else. And now to make everything fair all round, this, my daughters, is Mervyn Veneering, who's come into our business in succession to his father. He's going to be a great man some day, in botany above all, so you must treat him with a certain reverence; but otherwise he's a very nice lad, only two years older than Hetty. And now, if we've all finished, let's go out and play something—croquet, tennis, cricket."

They went out on to the terrace. Here, walking up and down, were Mortimer Lightwood and Aunt Isabella Medlicott—the "Aunt Izzy" of the children. "Lightwood," said Harmon, "this is Mervyn Veneering, son of your old client at Calais; our already invaluable shorthand secretary—why weren't we *all* taught shorthand at school, before everything else, after reading, writing, and arithmetic? You can never learn it when you're turned thirty, as I am. And Mervyn, this is Aunt Izzy, eternally young and beautiful, known to the world as Miss Isabella Medlicott, but I dare say she will let you call her Aunt Izzy, as she does with all really nice people who are under twenty."

Mortimer Lightwood was a rather cynical-looking gentleman about Mr. Harmon's own age, who used, in these later days, an eye-glass when he wished to make sure of anything or anybody; but after all he had advised Mervyn's father for many years over his affairs, so Mervyn turned to him as to a friend; and from Aunt Izzy—a large and stout lady, with only the slightest resemblance to the gaunt Mrs. Wilfer—he received a cordial greeting, based chiefly on his good looks and the romance attaching to a young fellow who had lived chiefly on the wicked Continent.

Then they passed on below the first terrace of flowers to the tennis lawns. Here, there were Reggie and Johnny Harmon playing a rather angry game of tennis with a disputed score. A pony, which had obviously no business on the cricket field beyond, was passing a head over the hedge and listening to their dispute. "Boys," called out their father, "come and make Mervyn's acquaintance; you can call him in as umpire in your dispute."

A little ungraciously, and still with a frown on his handsome boyish face, Reggie Harmon—whose life so far had been extraordinarily embittered by his middle name being Boffin, and Eton having, in consequence, refused to know him under any other designation than Muffin—Reggie Harmon came forward, whisking his tennis racquet, and shook Mervyn's hand; so also did the slyer-looking Johnny. Mervyn listened to the matter in dispute—a trumped-up squabble between two over-petted, insufficiently-exercised, unwhipped boys—and pronounced quite a clever verdict, which a little surprised and impressed them. He talked to them about French tennis—the real thing—and they became interested. He played a game of lawn tennis with Reggie and beat him handsomely, though evidently a novice on the grass. Then he went through a game with Johnny and was more easily victorious.

Then they took him for a walk round the nearer part of the estate, and brought him back in time to "dress" for dinner, while they went off to a noisy tea-fight in the schoolroom.

It was obvious that Reggie despised any young male who had not been or was not going through Eton, and therefore Mervyn must always suffer an under-estimation on that account; at the same time, it partly satisfied his elder-brother-jealousy of Johnny that their father destined him for the lesser status of Harrow, and to Harrow Johnny was going next month. Mervyn, of course, had undergone the damaging process of having been brought up abroad—in itself a terrible handicap; and, of course, it was understood that he was impelled by his position to work in the City like a clerk, and to take an interest in those beastly drugs. Why *would* father always talk about them, just as though he was a chemist! It made Reggie's cheeks burn with shame when county people came to tea or tennis, or even—he believed—dinner, and father went on about his drug discoveries and researches. . . . Still, Mervyn's handling of a racquet inspired respect, and he was tall for eighteen and manly-looking: characteristics that seemed oddly at variance with his knowledge of French. Reggie's father, it was true, had a remarkable command of that language, but then father was altogether "odd" and was only saved, in his son's estimation, by his seat in Parliament, his standing in the county, and the fact that the county swells were unquestionably his friends. Reggie forgave his father much because he was vouched for by Lady Feenix, the other side of the Severn, and Lady Feenix, in Reggie's eyes, was unquestionable. He adored her, though he would never dare to tell her so.

In one way and another Mervyn passed an absolutely happy week at Chacely Priory. Bella saw his happiness, and pleaded with her John that he should be

pressed to stay on; the girls liked him ever so much; the boys were impressed by him, and he even seemed to be doing them good by his enthusiasm for science. Aunt Izzy said he was a perfect darling, and even Mortimer Lightwood expressed surprise that such a being could have Hamilton Veneering for father and Anastasia for mother.

"Ah," said John, "you don't know what life in France has made of Annie Veneering; she is an altogether different creature to the vapid idiot that once dispensed hospitality in Stucconia. But as to Mervyn, we mustn't spoil him. I'll pretend I dislike him, am disappointed in him, sooner than he shall be spoilt untimely."

So Mervyn went back to London at the end of August, with the prospect of a visit to Chacely at Christmas time, and once more lived at the Old Curiosity Shop in Villiers Street and studied the amazingly interesting human products of the Strand.

In the partners' room at Harmon and Veneering's office in Mincing Lane, in the following October, Mr. Wilfer touched the spring bell that stood on his writing table. It gave a long, clear, resonant sound—there was no nonsense or avoidable cause of wasted time in this establishment. Mervyn entered in response to its noise, and "Mervyn," said old Mr. Wilfer, "I have to see a rather trying person this afternoon, and I look to you to help me to make the interview as little disagreeable as possible. Her name" (looking at a letter in an envelope), "her name is 'Mrs. Venables,' and she comes from New Zealand. But she is in other aspects my daughter Susan, or Susie, as she preferred to be called. For a long time she was known as 'Susie Wilbraham,' a stage name, and if your childish memory was—what shall I say, phenomenal? you could remember her by that, because she stayed some months with

your mother at Calais when you were a little boy of —of——"

"Of between three and four. I have only the dimmest recollections of her. Jeanne remembered her better; but as we grew up we had a sort of notion—I don't know who told us—that it was—no longer—no longer——"

"No longer proper to talk about her? I dare say. We won't go into that. There were many sad stories about her in earlier days. However, she went out to —to—New Zealand—and—lived at first with my eldest son John, out there, a man no longer young, who has got on surprisingly well—I am glad to say—and is in touch with our firm here. Married a very nice wife—a German—Grete Wilfer—coming over to see us some day. . . . Must make haste, I begin to tell her in my letters. I'm seventy-two, now, and John's mother, my poor wife, died more than two years ago. . . . However, about Susan—Mrs. Venables as she is now. She had made quite a nice bit of money—on the stage mostly—when she went out to New Zealand in 1867, and she wasn't long out there before she got married. Then all sorts of troubles came on her. . . . However, I haven't time to tell you the rest of her story now. She ought to be here in a quarter of an hour if she is punctual. I asked her to call on a Saturday afternoon, because—well, after fifteen or more years I—I—hardly —know. . . . But I expect by now, as it's a fine afternoon, we haven't any other people indoors besides Slopey, you, and me. But—dear boy—unless you're very particularly pledged—er—don't go away—till she has gone. Stay here and see me through the afternoon, and I'll find some other holiday occasion for you——"

"*Of course* I will, Mr. Wilfer. We never made such a fuss about Saturday in France as they're be-

ginning to make here; but then, of course, we had ever so much jollier Sundays. . . . But didn't you want also to say something about those three kinds of Strophanthus seeds?"

"Of course I did, and a very good thing to fill up the time, both before she comes and after she's gone. Get out the trays. I'll dictate something to you and your wonderful shorthand. I thought we ought to send them on down to Kew, for examination, next Monday or Tuesday. They're South African and South-East African; the strongest seem to come from the neighbourhood of Delagoa Bay."

Mervyn Veneering borrowed the old partner's keys, went to a case in a corner of a locked cupboard, and presently placed three open trays before Mr. Wilfer.

"Ah," said the latter, "*Strophanthus courmonti—Strophanthus potersianus,* and—and—*Strophanthus kombe,* seemingly the strongest. How like these are to melon seeds! . . . This is going to be an amazing drug for certain heart troubles and for——"

Voices outside. The uncouth-looking but extremely important and authoritative hall porter comes in: "A lady to see you, Mr. Wilfer."

"Quite so. Quite so. Ready in a moment. Mervyn! Just help me put these trays on this table. I think I will sit here; there is more light and I want to sort these seeds before I go. There! one tray in front of me, and one on either hand. I want to be quite sure that they are all separated and not mixed. The distinction is small but quite noticeable when I have my glasses on. Now you can go back to the clerk's room, and—and—do any letters you have on hand—and if I want you, I will touch the bell. I am quite ready now, Slopey."

Slopey retires, returns, and announces "Mrs. Venables."

"Oh, Susie, my dear! *What* a time since we last met! *What* a time! You heard, I suppose—you must have heard of your poor Mamma's death?"

"Oh, *I* heard somehow; but it wasn't about that I came to see you. There was never much love lost between mother and myself. Can't remember I was ever indebted to her in any way, except, of course, giving me birth and bringing me up till I was able to eat. Well, Pa, *you* don't look so bad—done pretty well for yourself?"

"Why, yes, my dear, very well—very well—after fifty-two years of work—thanks to John Harmon——"

"Then you'll be ready to help me when I want it. You know I'm forty-four and pretty well sick of men. The last—Venables—was a horror. Whatever induced me to marry him, *I* can't think; but I was always weak where men were concerned. In three years he'd spent all the money I'd saved and earned and left me with just about enough—before he died of delirium tremens—to pay for a first-class passage back home again and a hundred pounds over to keep me while I was looking round for something to do. 'Spose the best thing I can do is to live with *you* and look after you now mother's gone——"

"Well—er—as to that, you know, I'm afraid *that* wouldn't do. You'd find it very dull in Chelsea amongst the artists and writers—I should think so, at least—and then Lavvy is not far off, with quite a rising family, and she and her daughters give me an eye. I'm still rather a busy man—a partner, here, you know. Our business is very important—and John Harmon, the head of it, is abroad just now—and then, again, as to Lavvy, she—she's not very easy to get on with—*Good Heavens! What* have you been doing?"

Susie was lying back in her chair, breathing stertorously, her eyes half-closed showing the under-whites,

her face a dull purple. On her lower lip were fragments of the tough skins of the flat, melon-like Strophanthus seeds; in the finger and thumb of the right hand were similar vestiges. Whilst he had been talking she must have reached out her hand and taken Strophanthus seeds from the trays in the infatuation that they were melon seeds. He knew something of the danger and the remedy. Mervyn rushed out to get a City doctor; Mr. Wilfer, with the assistance of Slopey, the hall porter, strove with wooden paper-knives to force open her teeth and administer an antidote or an alleviative; but the doctor, when he came, bore away a seemingly dying woman to the nearest hospital.

However, enough of the antidote had reached the veins to stave off the full action of the poison; in addition to which Susie was an uncommonly tough human being. Presently she was sick from the emetics administered, and the anxious father was assured she had passed out of danger. A night in the hospital, and she might be well enough to be sent, the next morning, in a cab to Chelsea. Reluctantly he gave the address of his quiet, comfortable house near the Chelsea Bridge. . . . He must take her in there till her situation could be straightened out. . . . He returned to the office and told this to Mervyn, whom he released from attendance. The two sought a river steamer and by it regained their respective homes.

CHAPTER VIII

MIRIAM CLEMENTS

MERVYN had not lived very long at the Old Curiosity Shop—of course, it never knew or owned to such a title, it was simply 19, Villiers Street, Strand, the last of the houses on the left hand side, looking south—before he realised that on the same floor as himself there dwelt another lodger, Miss Miriam Clements. And it also thrilled him to learn from the rambling, somewhat cryptic sentences of Mrs. Fairbairn, his landlady, that she was a stage star, a celebrated actress of somewhat varied fortunes and vacillating status. "When good, there's no one to touch 'er," Mrs. Fairbairn would say, "and why she shouldn't be always good it isn't for you or me to say . . . temper, I s'pose, or private troubles, or 'er digestion. *I* ain't proof meself against broiled mackerel."

"What are her troubles about?" Mervyn would reply eagerly. He had hardly been more than a week in London without finding his way to the particular Strand theatre in which Miss Clements was acting, and in the course of another week he had got as far as saying "Good morning" and "Good evening" when they met on the stairs or the landing. She had, on each occasion, replied very pleasantly to his politeness.

"'Usbands chiefly, where all women's troubles mainly comes from. I've bin on the London stage meself—Drury Lane Pantomimes, 'fore you was born, and ought to know. What 'er name reely is or was, *I*

couldn't tell you. On the stage it's 'Clements,' 'Miriam Clements,' and it 'as to be 'Miss' for the sake of the public. The public wouldn't tolerate a leading lady in sentimental parts—young and good-looking parts, I mean—who was a Mrs. A Mrs. on the stage must be either a comic character or 'eavy tragedy. But about Miss Clements: she certainly was married once, but fell out with 'er 'usband some'ow, and seems to take it to 'eart, with all 'er laughin' and talkin'. . . . 'Owever, I don't s'pose she'll do you much 'arm. She's bin 'ere three years, an', although some of 'er friends makes a lot of noise, on Sundays 'speshally—she says it's arguments about the stage as a soshal factor—I reely don't think there's *any* 'arm in 'er or I'd say so, to put you on yer guard."

So, by degrees—for he had an element of caution in him—Mervyn's greetings, when they met once a week or so, became more elaborate. The mere allusion to the goodness of the morning or evening—we never comment on the badness—was supplemented by reference to the weather.

During August and September, Miss Clements was away, or at any rate was never visible. She reappeared, however, one morning on the landing in mid-October, a few days after the upset at the office over Susie Venables. Mervyn thought this time she looked a decidedly handsome woman; the two or three months out of London had effaced the look of maturity about her face; her eyes were charming with dancing lights, and there was colour in her cheeks that seemed due to healthy, coursing blood and not to rouge.

"Good morning!" she replied. "Why, we haven't met for—for—ever so long. I've been away in the provinces, and you?"

"Well, *I*'ve been pretty much in London. I'm not

tired of London yet! It's all so new to me. But I've also had a delightful holiday in the country, so I've nothing to grumble at."

"You look to me a young man not much disposed to grumble at anything."

"Oh, I don't know! But life seems very interesting, at my age."

She smiled and nodded and went out.

A few days later they met again. He was returning earlier than usual from the office. The fine weather had changed to rain. Mr. Harmon, who brightened so much of Mervyn's life, was away abroad; Mr. Wilfer was exceedingly worried about his returned daughter, Mrs. Venables. It was making him ill. Mrs. Sampson, the younger daughter, instead of helping him out of the dilemma had accentuated it by a rousing quarrel with the returned widow, and an invitation to her father to invoke the police to remove her from his house. Mervyn had a secret longing to return to Calais and see his mother and sister, but knew he could not, having now got into the thick of his evening classes at King's College.

Miriam read a little of this dissatisfaction with events in his face. She said: "Come into my sitting-room and have some tea." He wavered and assented, but stipulated he should first pass into his own rooms and make himself tidy, after work in a City office.

Her sitting-room was comparatively large, like his own, but also rather well furnished; and the articles of furniture were more congruous, more of one period. Perhaps some of them belonged to her, or it might have been her taste in flowers, her woman's quality of home-making that gave the apartment a more personal, less of a "lodging" character. And the outlook from the two windows was amusing, more intimate and a little quieter than his; nothing of the station and the noisy trains: young trees, peeps of the

river and the gaunt buildings beyond, half-formed public gardens, edges and relics of noble houses or suggestions of comedy in stucco, proprieties of the early Victorian period.

"You like my look-out? I'm so glad. To me it is a whole series of volumes of Dickens or Thackeray. It suggests endless romances, queer stories, jokes, gasps, tears, and laughter. I've had rather a rough time for seven or eight years; but I always fight hard to keep these rooms."

"I can quite believe it. I like my own very much, in spite of the noise from the station. . . . But then, looking at the station, for me, is rather a relief. I always feel I've only got to step across there any evening or early morning and I could take train and steamer home—my father and mother live near Calais."

"I see. Well, *my* mother is dead, long since, my father has married a second time, and I'm pretty much alone in the world. I suppose you know who I am, from our landlady? I believe she—in the 'sixties—was a fairy in Drury Lane Pantos. If you don't, let me introduce myself. I'm Miriam Clements, and I'm acting at the Globe Theatre, and have been for three years—about the time I've been here."

"Yes. I did know. I—I—noticed you soon after I came here—last June—and then one night I saw you on the stage, though it was more your voice I recognised at first than your face."

"I suppose I looked to you, then, ten years younger than I really am?"

"Oh, well—no; but sometimes here, on the stairs or the landing, you looked so tired."

"I should think I did! Stage life simply wears you out, or at least rehearsals do. And yet I am supposed to be lucky as an actress. I am only thirty-two, and already I'm a 'leading lady' and earning about seven hundred a year! However, I'm not going to bother

you with any biography. For a very young man *you* look tired and a little home-sick. Here comes Mrs. Fairbairn with the tea."

Mrs. Fairbairn glanced at Mervyn rather ironically, but said nothing. Miss Clements addressed her as "Rosalie," a concession to her stage past, and made a few remarks about the supper tray which was to await her return. Then she once more devoted herself to Mervyn. He was made to eat one of the poached eggs on toast, and he was given a large cup of excellent tea; and several sweet dainties brought from a scarcely visible cupboard opened from a key borne on a chain which Miss Clements wore about her person.

"Your name seems a funny one . . . if I've heard it rightly," said Miriam, who was eating her poached egg with some appetite, "Veneering? Is that so?"

"Yes, you pronounce it rightly. But Jeanne and I like to think it is really Flemish—Van Eering. Father says that's a regular Dutch name. And we more or less know we descend from Dutch or Flemish people who settled in Essex centuries ago. . . . And *your* name, Clements, is it real? Or a stage name——?"

"Ah, *there* you're carrying the war into my country. It was tactless of me to start the subject. 'Miriam Clements' sounds all right, and I almost think it's mine, now. I've grown into it. But it wasn't my name seven or eight years ago, though it has the same initials; and so my people, who are mainly connected with the Church, can see it advertised on the omnibuses and the hoardings and not wince. I had to think of a name to act under . . . ten years ago . . . and I was going to call on a dramatic agent off the Strand and looked up at St. Clement's steeple clock to see the time—which it never tells accurately—and thought 'I'll call myself Miriam Clements.' I now can't think of myself under any other name, so there it is."

Mervyn: "I see. Then . . . I hope you don't

think me awfully rude, putting these questions? Then . . . you're just *Miss—Miss* Miriam Clements. I—I—mean—you aren't Mrs. Something-or-other——"

Miriam: "No, that isn't my name. I'm just Miriam Clements, once and for all. Just a woman of thirty-two who's had a clergyman for a father and rather a good education—for a girl—and who's afterwards had a jolly hard time on the stage, working up to be a leading lady. . . . Won't you have another cup of tea?"

Mervyn: "Thanks. Well, if it comes to names, you know, *I* haven't been quite—what should I say—consistent? My first name I spell now M-e-r-v-y-n. But the name given to me at my christening was really—I am told—'Melvin.' A rotten name. Just because it belonged to some poor old buffer whom they induced to be my godfather. Jeanne and I think it's monstrous we shouldn't, when we come of age—say at eighteen—give ourselves the Christian names we want. *She* didn't ask to be called Joanna—hideous! So she changed her name to Jeanne, which is nearly the same. But, in reality, she would like to have been called 'Melisande' or 'Aglaé.' I read somewhere that in so-called savage countries—what delicious chocolates you've got! I really oughtn't to have any more. . . . And I mustn't forget I've got to be at King's College by seven—I read in some book that African and Polynesian savages only use the names their mothers call them by till they are grown up. Then they take a fresh name of their own choosing. That's much more sensible. When I come of age I shall register myself somewhere as Mervyn Van Eering and drop out the horrid 'Alfred' my parents stuck in eighteen years ago, to please some old codger *called* Alfred. . . . Now I must be going——"

Miriam: "Well, for the matter of that, so must I—or at least in ten minutes from now. So I won't keep

you. But it's jolly to have made acquaintance. You're a nice boy. One day I'll come to tea with you."

Mervyn: "Oh, that *would* be nice. But you mustn't take me by surprise. I should like to have my sitting-room perfectly tidy; it isn't nearly as—as—pleasant to look at as this. But what I—I—most want to do—is to come one day to the Globe Theatre and see you behind the scenes. I thought you were all perfectly splendid in that piece, *The Rosary*. I do so want to see the old man who played the part of the priest. He was just right, just like an old priest I knew at Marquise——"

Miriam: "Oh, I'll tell him—Harry Sanders, you mean? He'll be pleased. But he's not a very good young man; not quite the sort of companion you ought to have. However, we mustn't stop to talk about this now. I've scarcely got five minutes to get ready, and you'll be late for your classes. Ta-ta!"

A few days after this, Mervyn heard at the office that Mr. Wilfer, who had been away staying with the Harmons in Gloucestershire, was very unwell, and that Mr. Harmon was back from wherever he had been to abroad, and would like to see him. He went into the partners' room. John Harmon was examining some drug through a magnifying glass. "Ah, Mervyn! There you are. I came back on Tuesday and went straight home and found my wife's father quite upset and out of sorts. It seems you were with him the day his New Zealand daughter—Mrs. Venables—came to the office, ate a Strophanthus seed, and unfortunately recovered. I mean, you know all about the occurrence?"

"I do, Mr. Harmon. I am afraid it's upset Mr. Wilfer very much, and that his daughter, Mrs. Sampson, couldn't solve the difficulty——"

"Why, no; she's accentuated it. The two—Lavvy Sampson and Susie Venables—apparently hate one

another. Against Lavvy there's never a word to be said. She mayn't be every one's fancy, and she's lacking in ideality. Her husband is here—you know him, a valuable member of our staff, though not precisely an amusing person. But all my sympathies would go with Lavvy and *her* establishment. I know more of Susie than is generally supposed—as *you* know—for I induced your good mother to take her in hand and find her a home fourteen or fifteen years ago. Before that she'd been on the stage. Then, in 1867, I sent her out to join her brother in New Zealand. I've had a very explicit letter, since my return, from John Wilfer. . . . By the bye, he's forwarded us a wonderful box of seeds and dried plants. . . . I don't think she would be welcomed back in New Zealand, even if we could induce her to go; and I shrink from having anything to do with her personally. . . . Yet *there* she is, occupying Mr. Wilfer's house and pledging his credit for food, and quarrelling with his two servants. . . . Seems to me rather absurd to be discussing this with a boy of—what are you? Eighteen? And at the present juncture I'm shaping a Bill for Parliament about a Ministry of Agriculture—sure to be thrown out—and thinking over some Tibetan drug plants."

Mervyn: "May I go and see Mrs. Venables? After all, I'm not quite a stranger to her. I know well Mr. Wilfer's house in Chelsea. I can explain my coming because she stayed with us when I was a little boy, and I was practically in this room when she ate the Strophanthus seeds. I have a further idea or two which I should like to put before you, but first I had better see what Mrs. Venables is like——"

Harmon: "Well, do as you think best, my boy. See her by all means, only don't absent yourself from King's College business. Take an hour or two off your attendance here, and I should say go there in the

morning. You're much more likely to find her in then."

So Mervyn went one morning, at about eleven, to Mr. Wilfer's house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea. Susie herself opened the door out of consuming anxiety as to what the knock meant.

"You don't remember me, Mrs. Venables?" he said, "though you once passed several months in my home at Calais."

"Why—not one of the Veneerings?"

"Yes; the eldest boy, Mervyn. Lance was only a baby when you were there, and *I* can scarcely remember you. Only I heard from your father who you were, the other day, and that you were living at his house. So I thought I'd like to come and renew acquaintance——"

"Well, rather a funny time in the day to pay a call. Ladies aren't supposed to receive visitors till the afternoon, and as you see, I'm not properly dressed"—as, indeed, she was not—looking fully her forty-four or forty-five years in her untidy morning garb, and with no cap on her untidy hair—all married ladies wore caps still at the opening of the 'eighties. "And they must work you pretty easy at your office if you're able to go gallivanting in the West End—Chelsea must be a very west-endy sort of place from its position—at eleven in the morning. I suppose Harmon or some one sent you round to see what I was doing? Why don't me father come back, 'stead of leaving me to face his trollops of servants? He half-killed me at his office by giving me poisonous melon seeds to chew——"

"Oh, come, Mrs. Venables, it wasn't like that, because I was there, taking down his notes. You came on him suddenly whilst he was examining Strophanthus seeds, and I'm sure it never occurred to him or me that you would take some up and put them in your

mouth. If he hadn't given you an antidote you might have died——"

"Well, 'chever way you put it. . . . But, *look* here! What's up? I'll lay you didn't leave your office and come here, all the way out to Chelsea, just to pass the time o' day."

"No. I didn't. I came, as I said, to see you and to talk about your father. I've been working with him for some months, and I have a great regard for him. He is nearly seventy-three, Mrs. Venables, as you know. He has worked in the City for fifty years and more. He had a nice, comfortable, quiet, pretty home. Look how untidy you've made it. Look at this room" —they had adjourned to the dining-room from the hall —"the stains on the table and on the side-board, the dusty chairs——"

"Well; that's the servants' business. Lazy hussies! But they're clearing out in a day or two unless Dad returns. And if they do and he don't, I shall advertise for lodgers and get in a 'char,' an' be mistress here—do the cooking myself; 'cause I shan't have any more money soon. I've only got seventy pounds left, out of what I brought back from New Zealand——"

"Well, then, look here. Couldn't we arrange things better? Mr. Wilfer, I'm sure, will stop away in the country altogether, sooner than live here with you. You don't want to stop in a dull place like Chelsea and take in lodgers, at your age and with your talents. Why don't you go back to the stage as a career? I know a lady—a very nice lady—that might give us advice in the matter if you cared to try. Shall I speak to her? Perhaps your father might make some small allowance for you to live on till you got a place in some theatre company. . . . May I try and find you a suitable place to lodge at, somewhere near the Strand, and then speak to this lady? She might give you per-

mission to call on her at the theatre and show her the sort of parts you were good at?"

"Well, upon me word, young jackanapes; you're a wonder at talking any woman over. Chelsea's a hell of a dull hole—no life in it. Say where I can meet you in the Strand this afternoon and we'll go and look for rooms together. Only if my old Dad don't keep me with enough to live on—decent, mind you—till I get back into the perfeshion, I'll come back here."

Mervyn, after consultation with Miriam, found a sitting-room and bedroom for the turbulent personality of Susie at a house in Great Queen Street, placing her as far off as he could—within the theatre radius—from his own lodgings in Villiers Street. Miriam had advised this particular lodging as "theatrical" but quite good; and although the rent was £75 a year, old Mr. Wilfer, in correspondence, guaranteed that payment of rent, provided Susie was the tenant. Mervyn was privately advised that he would probably pay that sum willingly for the rest of his life to be rid of a daughter who disgusted him with everything she said and did. His servants now agreed to stop, and devoted a week before he returned from Chacely to a thorough clean-up and repolishing. Wilfer, however, in becoming responsible for the rent, informed his daughter that he would only adhere to this arrangement on the understanding that she never came near him any more; he wished to hear and know nothing more of her till she died.

She shrugged her shoulders and informed Mervyn—the go-between—"It'd need *pounds* and *pounds* to induce her to make the weary journey from the heart of London to that dreary hole, Chelsea."

She attacked the British stage at a weak moment when many managements, influenced by the success of the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales's and the Hay-

market, and of Robertson's comedies, strove after naturalness and real "character," true dialects, and genuine feeling on the boards. Miriam, working towards similar ends, and influenced by her affection for Mervyn, and her desire to win favour in the eyes of John Harmon (whose power she appreciated), saw the opportunity of helping them over this trouble. She received Susie at her theatre dressing-room, tempered her truculence by some very plain speaking, but "sized her up," realised that, short of actual indecency and impropriety, if she merely came on the stage as "Susie," she might be a great success, start a new vein in comedy. A part in the new piece which was to succeed the successful *Rosary* at the end of January, 1881, was rewritten and enlarged to suit Susie's characteristics and bring out her rather disagreeable personality. She wasn't shy or afraid of any one. Rough as her playing had been in England and in New Zealand—in between her marriages—it had accustomed her to a stage, and to the right pitching of the voice. She was—as "Mrs. Venables"—to become in succeeding years a vogue, an institution. Comedy after comedy, and one or two tragedies, were adapted or written to include her truculent personality. If she was forty-five when she first appeared in Miriam's company, she must have been sixty-five, twenty years later, when she scored a huge success in *The Obstreperous Lady* at the Haymarket.

She never saw her father again after the autumn of 1880. He gradually made it known to her that so long as she never bothered him or any other member of the family, she would be paid, during his life-time and after his death, a hundred a year for her house rent. She referred to this arrangement rather jeeringly when he died in 1884; and she was at that time drawing a thousand a year in salary, "by just being herself."

But in this chapter we must not look too far ahead.

It must end by Miriam coming into contact with the Harmon family at Chacely Priory. Who Miriam really was and what her secret trouble was about may be told later on. Realise her, for the moment, as well dressed as the fashions of 1881 permitted, chiefly in tones of dark grey with just a glimpse of rose colour here and there peeping out, arriving at Tewkesbury, to be driven across the Severn to Chacely in a comfortable brougham. After some eleven years of desperate struggles, she has risen to a very good but very exacting position on the London stage. When first introduced into this story, she is heard alluding to her income as "seven hundred a year." As a matter of fact even then, in prudence, she understated it. That may have been all she got from Messrs. Ratti and Josué down to the autumn of 1880, but from the time of her father's second marriage to a wealthy widow he had allowed his rebellious daughter a hundred a year, besides paying her school and college expenses; and although her choice of a career and her marriage to an actor-manager had theoretically shocked him, he realised it was partly his own second entry into matrimony which had driven her to those courses, and acquitted his conscience by making that degree of provision for her. In those days, with a hundred a year, you could not starve: it was equivalent to three hundred a year at the present date.

But after the extraordinarily successful run of *The Rosary*—which had drawn large audiences to the Globe in two London runs of six months and four months, and secured tumultuous audiences in the country for three summer and autumn months—the management of Miriam's theatre had raised her salary to a hundred pounds a month, and had definitely engaged her at that pay for two years. (She played the part of the nun in *The Rosary,* which was a rather clever adaptation from the French.)

They had ceased playing *The Rosary* in London on January 25, 1881, and had sent it off with a subsidiary company for a six months' tour round England and Lowland Scotland—I think theatres were permitted in Scotland by 1881—and closed the Globe Theatre for ten days, partly to rest the company, further to clean and redecorate. Messrs. Ratti and Josué had done so well in this particular enterprise that they allowed their acting staff full pay for those ten days, and full scope for a holiday—an almost unprecedented degree, in those days, of managerial generosity to poor, harassed, overworked players. So Miriam might actually take a tiny holiday. She therefore accepted an invitation from Mrs. Harmon to spend a week of it at Chacely.

John Harmon quickly sized people up. He had taken an extraordinary liking to Mervyn, and therefore kept a wary eye on the people with whom he came into contact. Consequently, Miriam had soon come under observation. He judged people by their voices, accent, and pronunciation; by the look in their eyes and all round their eyes, the character of their fingers and nails. He appraised them by the way they did their hair, the shoes or boots they wore. He knew that with certain types of eyelid, lower lip or texture of skin, they could not be good company for his wife and children, poor souls, though other spheres might usually be found for their trained activities. He knew so much, for—and ahead of—his time, that he realised the scornful pitilessness of Nature or Providence or whatever it is or was that created dinosaurs, hippopotami, and Neanderthal Man; and he was very rarely wrong in his summing-up of modern human beings.

Therefore, having become much interested in Mervyn, and in any one who liked Mervyn, and tremulously hopeful that his wife's terrible sister Susan, whom not thirteen thousand miles in sailing vessels could keep

away, had at last been found a staying vocation by Mervyn's actress friend, he asked Bella to invite Miriam down to Chacely for a short rest before she appeared in the first night of the new play, *The Vintage.*

So on January 26, 1881, Miriam, looking frightfully tired and fully her age of thirty-two, but as becomingly and tastefully dressed and furred as the fatuities of 1881 fashions permitted—fortunately it was before women had fully assumed the giraffe figures of 1887—arrived at Chacely to spend a week's holiday.

The two boys, Reggie and John, to their raging disappointment, had been obliged to return to their respective schools of Eton and Harrow. Their father had assured them that the mischance of the arrival in their home of a distinguished actress, just after their departure, was no planned design on his part, but simply due to the facts that she could not arrive any earlier, and that they must not defer their resumption of school attendance; no doubt they would meet her later in London, or she would come when they were at home on other holidays. So Miriam arrived in intensely wintry weather to find a comparatively quiet house.

But life there—she concluded on the second day of her stay—was absolute bliss compared to an actress's working-day and night in London. She, who had known so little rest amid security, took seven days of a complete holiday, touched to melting by the tender faith of her reception. She arrived at the beautiful old house; was warmly greeted; was quickly placed in a quiet and charmingly furnished bedroom which would have been dim with the early winter dusk but for the brilliant leaping fire in its recessed grate. For 1881, the arrangements for washing and dressing were intelligent, and would have seemed modern to us, though they already existed in the advanced French houses of

that period and were probably enjoyed by Sophie de Lamelle in her Pyrenees retreat. Miriam was tacitly allowed an hour in which to rest, to change—if she wanted a change of clothing—and to wash off the dust of a railway journey. The effect and the efficiency of the fire-flames—logs from the Forest of Dean—were such that she needed not to light a candle. She lightened and loosened her costume—perhaps even by some fore-knowledge of what was shortly coming to pass, she made it into a tea-gown. At any rate she effaced some of her tiredness, regained a sparkle in the eyes, did her hair very nicely, and contemporaneously with the sounding of a gong of mellow tone there was a gentle tapping at her door.

Outside it stood little Helen, twelve or thereabouts, who, having tossed up with her two sisters for the privilege of being first entrant into Miss Clements's intimacy, had won and tripped upstairs to fetch her down on the pretext of showing the way.

Miriam kissed her—irresistibly—though she was much too sensible a woman to be lavish in caresses; but somehow in this delightful house she felt she could give way to her emotions, or to her tiredness, without being pilloried or ridiculed. Helen returned the kiss, and they went down to the drawing-room hand-in-hand.

This family reception room was still called by the early nineteenth-century name shortened from "withdrawing room," because into it the family really withdrew, when needful, from a too open contact with the outside world. Otherwise, much of its transactions took place in the hall. But in the hall it was difficult to contend that you were not at home if any fatiguing person called; and such a calling might, on that day, have tired the actress, after a journey down from London and the drive out from Tewkesbury. The drawing-room seemed to be three sitting-rooms thrown into

one, for the sufficient reason that it was such. You could concentrate your small society into one of its sections and leave the others in rich fire-lit gloom. Here, half-revealed by lamp-light, Miriam found her hostess and the other girls, the governess, Miss Mitcham, pouring out the tea, and Aunt Izzy reading a yellow-backed novel of Ouida's writing. Coal and wood were then so cheap and came from so near at hand, in the Forest of Dean, that the house could be kept thoroughly warm. There were three bonny fires burning—glowing is a pleasanter and more apposite word—in each of the three grates. But for snugness lamps were only lit in the section where the tea was set forth. Bella had asked the governess to manage the dispensing of the tea that afternoon so that she might devote herself more especially to her tired guest. Her husband came in just as tea had started, but left Miriam to talk with his wife and daughters, whilst he alternately teased Aunt Izzy, as she liked to be teased, and plied her with sandwiches and cakes.

"She is really my youngest aunt," explained Bella, under cover of the conversational noise and laughter. "My mother's youngest sister. . . . We have her here to stay constantly, to make up for very seldom inviting her elder sister whom we secretly dislike. . . . Aunt Izzy is quite harmless, and even rather kindly. Were you ever troubled by aunts?"

"Never. My father, who is a clergyman in Kensington, is really of Irish origin, and left most of his relations behind there when he came to England; and in Ireland they have remained. My mother was English—Hertfordshire—but she died when I was sixteen, and a year or two later my father married again—a horrid woman—three thousand a year—he wants to be made a bishop. Since then I have seen very little of him. Not that he dislikes the stage—he rather patronises it—Lyceum performances and such-like.

But my stepmother dislikes *me*, and the feeling is amply returned on my part——"

"I see. Now you must have another cup. Do you like this China tea?"

"*Rather.* It is new to my palate. We get nothing but Indian in London. . . . I'm almost shamelessly hungry——"

"How nice of you to be so. We find most people are at this hour, so our teas are very ample. We dine at half-past seven—if that suits you?"

"Perfectly. It will be a pleasant change after six or half-past, which is my usual hour—or rather I eat a lightish meal then and have a sort of supper after my acting is over; though no doctor considers that is good for one. . . . I'm glad you don't mind large appetites down here. I'm very seldom hungry, really hungry in London. But ever since I got out at Tewkesbury I have thought of little but things to eat, and meals I could enjoy."

The next morning, the maid who brought the little tray with tea and bread and butter, also conveyed a wish from Mrs. Harmon that Miss Clements would not get up to breakfast at nine-thirty, but take her breakfast in bed. Miriam yielded to the suggestion because the excessive snowfall during the night was given—by the maid—as one of the reasons. But on the following day Miriam's constitution declared against the "actress's" predilections. She was down and out in the crisp air, and in the level rays of the sun shining from across the distant Severn. She had put on sensible boots, and such kind of spat or gaiters as the undeveloped ideas of 1881 permitted. The air was a tonic, the temperature just a degree below freezing-point. The snowfall of the last three days had ceased. Under a pale blue sky the world around was dazzlingly white, though the white seemed divided

between pale golden white where the sun's rays fell, and bluish white in the spaces shielded from the sunlight. Only the innermost parts of the tree masses seemed black green, where the snow could not penetrate and lodge; and the perpendicular walls of the Priory were a warm-tinted grey with deep snow canopies and crusts on every level or sloping surface.

Yesterday they had almost been confined to the house by the snowfall which was exceptional and to become historic. But on this morning of January 28 the snow had been cut and swept along the main roads from the Priory to the greenhouses. In a row of these, half an hour before the downstairs' breakfast, Miriam encountered the governess with scissors and a basket, cutting flowers and foliage for the dining-table and the drawing-room.

"Mr. Harmon, after some training, allows me to do this. He's confident that I shan't do any harm, shan't cut off something he wants for experiment or for seed. I've been here nearly two years now, and have quite got to understand. I was even—if it doesn't sound too repellant—something of a botanist, before they engaged me. My father works at Kew. The daughters here are dear girls, as you must have seen, and women being still free as to their education are able to learn something of botany; whereas boys—well, they can only do so if they are quite poor, without social ambition. . . . Would you like to help? My basket was an unambitious thing to bring. . . . Won't hold half the things I've cut. . . . I can roll up the other sprays in this newspaper if you could carry the basket. We'll put everything in water in a large basin when we get indoors. Then nothing will fade while we're having breakfast. I'm awfully hungry."

"So am I."

The next day the snow began to melt, and ran in rivers of mud and water down towards the little stream,

and thence to the swollen Severn. In two days more it had turned to churned mud on the roads, and was no more visible on the evergreens, which were black-green masses against stormy skies. Now, at last, they could drive out and see famous views or visit bustling towns, packed with history. The herb gardens were once more visible, though very dreary, any inspection of them, save in goloshes and looped-up petticoats, being inadvisable; moreover, the greenhouses were much more interesting now that the snow was off their roofs.

"Never mind our outsides," said John Harmon; "you can come and see that in the summer. You're down here just now to eat and sleep and rest and listen to my stories, and play badminton in the gallery—only mind the pictures—and the piano after dinner. And I've got a well-furnished library, and you're fond of reading."

He and she sat in it one afternoon after lunch, looking and laughing at old *Punches*. Seeing they were alone for the moment, Miriam said: "I'm going to-morrow, as you know. Your sweet wife has asked me to stay till Monday, but I must have three clear days in London before the new piece begins. I—I——" her voice cracked a little and roughened, tears were not far off, but *must* be kept back, "shall I tell you a little more about myself before I go?"

"My dear lady, so far as Bella and I are concerned, we don't want—I mean we don't need—to know any more about you to decide that you make a very jolly addition to our home guests . . . and if there is anything more to be said, I have also felt you have been a real friend to a young fellow—Mervyn—in whom I have become greatly interested. I was rather staggered at first when I found he had taken up his abode in Villiers Street; but when I realised that you shared the house with him—I mean when I came to know you——"

"Thank you. Yet, somehow, though I hate to talk to most people about myself—even the people who are playing with me at the theatre know very little about me—I want to tell you and your wife who I am. . . . You have been so kind, you have, in a sense, called me back to the life of decent people. . . . Well, my father was—is—the Rev. Cyrus Wellings, of St. Bartholomew's, Kensington."

"*That* man? Really! Supposed to be awfully eloquent and original. Doesn't mind Darwin. Some talk of his getting a bishopric. Reconciliation of Religion and Science——"

"I dare say. It sounds horrid to say so, but *I* think he's a humbug. I never quite forgave him for the way he treated my mother. She was a saint, and a perfect darling at one and the same time. And his second marriage has made him much worse. My mother was English—I wish I wasn't half Irish——"

"Oh, *don't* say that. It makes you just the splendid actress you are——"

"Well! we'll leave it at that. But what I wanted to say to you—and to your wife—was that my name was once—eleven years ago—Mary Wellings—and that I changed it then, just after I got on to the stage—into Mary Cochrane, because I had fallen in love with Victor Cochrane—you may have heard his name?—the manager of a London theatre. He was awfully kind to me at my start. We were married—at a registry office—and for more than a year I was very happy. Then a baby was coming, so I gave up acting for some months. And then Victor ran away—went back to the United States—he was really a Canadian, and he had a mad wife in Canada, in some asylum. P'raps she wasn't mad—got well again—or p'raps some one wanted to injure him. But in fear of being had up for bigamy he bolted to the United States. . . . Several times he wrote to me—I think his wife is really

dead now—but I never answered his letters, because my baby had died, and somehow I loathed his memory. . . . Now I expect after my telling you this, which scarcely any other person about me knows, you'll never ask me here again, or your wife would object to your doing so. . . . Whether my father knows or not, I couldn't say. He allows me—has allowed me, since he married this woman with three thousand a year—a hundred and twenty pounds yearly, in return for which I sedulously avoid going near him—ignore him—so as not to stop his being made a bishop. Now I've told you everything. Except for the horror about Victor—the very name should have been a warning to me—I'm perfectly respectable, *far* too old to fall in love with Mervyn. Indeed, I notice that although the Press acclaims me as a great actress, whether I am or not—no one ever makes love to me—for which I ought to be very thankful."

"My dear Miss Clements, I am sincerely sorry for the trouble in your life, but it does not make the slightest difference to the opinion I have formed of you, and have already confided to Bella. I feel you have done altogether the right thing in telling us the main facts of your life. I shall never mention them to any one but my wife. I hope you will look upon me as your friend, and come to us whenever you can get a holiday. And I am quite sure the *best* part of your life lies before you. Now let's rouse up the girls and go on some tour of inspection before it's dark."

CHAPTER IX

MERVYN IN THE GAVE D'ASPE

IN 1871 Mr. Podsnap died. He had never been in good health since his attack of the sun, or whatever it was, that upset him at the Paris Exhibition, and he had retired from business altogether two years before, and become a rather fretful invalid.

Georgiana had continued unwillingly to live with her parents at a house in a shady corner just off Portman Square (a hanger-on of the square, after it was numbered 29*a*); but with the relative independence she had enjoyed since her one-and-twentieth birthday based on her inheritance of a thousand pounds a year, she insisted on paying at least two visits to France, in spring and autumn, to stay with Sophie de Lamelle. After her father's death, Sophie constrained her to remain with her mother; but when the latter also died (in 1875) of some intestinal trouble not then diagnosed, Georgy sold the family mansion and furniture, pensioned off or dismissed the servants, all except her own experienced maid, who accompanied her on these Continental trips, and joined her beloved Mme. de Lamelle in the Pyrenees.

This was in 1876. Sophie had continued after the Paris Exhibition to serve the French Ministry of Police, with occasional visits (partly on police business) to Alfred at Monaco or Condamine; but in 1870—before the Franco-Prussian War—she accepted service under John Harmon in connection with his Pyrenees nursery for the cultivation of drug plants and trees

requiring that particular climate. Her headquarters were in the pleasant town of Oloron, though the actual nurseries were six or seven miles away, on the lowest slopes of the Pyrenees. She had by this time, besides her original annuity of £115, the interest yearly on a safely invested five to six thousand pounds (say, £220), and a salary from Messrs. Harmon, Veneering and Co. of £150 a year; a total income of about £485. But Georgy, when she joined her at Pau in 1876, was a rich woman, with an annual revenue not far short of £3,500. She threatened to bestow this wealth on some Institute for the Deaf and Dumb or an Orthopædic Hospital if Sophie would not share it with her. Sophie laughed and agreed. She wrote to Harmon, saying the Pyrenean gardens were not paying a profit, and until they did she would take no further salary. The Scottish superintendent was worth his pay, and as an acquitment of conscience she would make an occasional visit to the Vallée d'Aspe for no remuneration. But though she would continue to live near his plantations —she and her friend were taking a villa on the outskirts of Pau—she must be free to travel when and where fancy dictated. Indeed, she rather contemplated coming with Georgy to see him in England next summer.

Occasionally, without Georgy, she migrated to Condamine and looked up Alfred. He aged very much during the later 'seventies. If she, Sophie, was fifty-nine in 1880, he must have been about sixty-two, and in consequence sixty-three in the late spring of 1881, when a letter from his valet announced that he was very ill; too ill to write. So Sophie travelled across southern France and arrived at Monte Carlo in the beginning of June.

She had not seen these present rooms of her husband in the upper part of Monte Carlo. They were on the

second floor of a new, luxurious suite of tall houses on the north side of the public gardens, looking down on the Casino, half a mile to the southward. The views from the windows of Alfred's suite were sumptuous. Beyond the flowering trees and palms and beds of brilliant flowers were the domed buildings of the Casino and then the blue Mediterranean; and on this morning of her arrival there was, above the hard horizon line, a faint, blue-grey silhouette of Corsica, like an island hanging above the sea, scarcely real. She took off her grey, close-fitting hat with green ribbons; touched here and there with ungloved fingers her abundant dark-grey hair, to assure herself of tidiness after the train; then sat down to await the summons to Alfred's bedside.

Her husband was a ghastly-looking object, between the white sheets, only redeemed from the appearance of a preposterous caricature by a something of imposing grief and suffering in the large, blood-shot eyes, now distinctly betraying their Levantine origin in the hazel iris and distended pupil. His nose, naturally protuberant, was swollen, and purple-red with the many years of too much heating food and too much wine. His cheeks were flaccid and also purplish red, though partly masked with grey whiskers. The shaven chin was likewise flushed. So was the forehead under the incongruously gay night-cap.

An intelligent doctor, twenty-five to thirty years later in the world's experience, would have diagnosed the case as an extreme form of blood pressure. But such a definite conclusion was unknown in 1881. "Monsieur souffrait d'un coup de sang" was the nearest to the truth that the Monte Carlo practitioner had got when called in by the alarmed valet, four days previously. His appearance now with the purple, congested complexion was so terrible that recovery seemed impossible. The only feature in the face which did not

inspire repulsion was the eyes. Now that death was near, there was an animal appeal in them to which she was not insensible.

"How did you bring this on?" she asked, more as a formality than with any hope of true information. His reply was little comprehensible, a disordered mass of words in a low tone of voice; sometimes, even, phrases, long sentences of French, as though he did not always distinguish her personality. Yet his babble ended with the word often repeated: "Forgive!" or "Forgive and forget."

"*Forgive,* my poor creature? What is there to forgive?" replied Sophie, the mask of cold indifference falling from her. "We have done the best we could for ourselves in a hard world. I don't see we have been more blameworthy than the generality of people. At any rate, we have surmounted our difficulties and become moderately successful and respectable. *Forgive?* There's nothing for me to forgive you. The people I cannot forgive—if it matters two straws to say so—are those who wasted the best twenty years of my life—at Harrogate——"

She was going to have added: "And now what is to be done for *you?*" in the fatuous optimism of a healthy person; but the fatal look in his face checked her. Doctor and valet came in at that moment. The doctor bowed and began an examination of his patient, while the valet assisted to move and replace the stricken man.

Not to embarrass them Sophie passed back into the opulent, garish sitting-room, where the blinds had been pulled up for some process of the doctor's. She pulled them down to shut out the sunshine and the taunting view of gaiety and liveliness outside. . . .

Alfred de Lamelle died that night, or rather at an early hour in its morning. The valet was a Corsican,

like an unfrocked priest, but a decent enough fellow, who had known Sophie several years. Down below or up above in the servants' quarters he described his master as "un pauvre bougre, fichu par les liqueurs," but his manner with Mme. de Lamelle—who always carried about her a vague impression of being in some way connected with the police, was correct and discreetly sympathetic. He brought her her husband's keys, assisted her to open this and find that, and discover such will as Alfred had drawn up and executed. This was of three years previously, done after he had had a nasty, ill-defined attack of something—probably blood pressure. It was in French—a stereotyped form sold at stationers'—made no mention of any relatives, left anything he died possessed of to his wife, "Sophie de Lamelle." He himself had adopted that mode of spelling his name when she chose it in 1867, alleging an interrupted French ancestry.

Sophie, when it seemed that he was dying, had sent for a priest and boldly averred him to be a Roman Catholic, so that he might obtain burial in a nice part of the cemetery. What did it matter? She herself in the later 'sixties had conformed to Catholicism, as it made her position under the Police Ministry more satisfactory, and it was un-English in those days and suited her revised name and her grudge against Harrogate and London.

So Alfred de Lamelle was buried in a nice part of the Monte Carlo cemetery, his estate was nicely wound up, his valet was given the equivalent of a hundred pounds, and after all dues and duties and local fiss-fass-fuss were attended to, Mme. de Lamelle left Monte Carlo in a very hot July and returned to the Pyrenees and her attached Georgy. She would now be able to add about seven thousand pounds to her other capital sum; or, two hundred and eighty pounds a year to her modest income of three hundred and twenty. "Six

hundred a year, my dear!" she said to her friend. "Now you'll find I shall be becoming quite insolent. Six hundred a year! But, alas, I'm now sixty years old. My hair is grey, my lip has to be treated by a Pau chemist, at intervals, to eliminate a grey moustache, my figure has woefully gone to pieces in the last few years. Still, my digestion remains fairly good, though I've had to give up the *escargots* in the *hors d'œuvres*. But my teeth have been well attended to—the French dentists are far ahead of the English. I dare say with care and prudence I may have another ten years before me in which I can travel with you about the nice parts of Europe. . . . But we'll keep our home quarters here. . . . And here or hereabouts I should like to die, when death can't be put off any longer. Since I've come to know this Pyrenees country, I've alwavs been amazed and thankful it isn't more run after."

"I know," said Georgy, in general acquiescence. "But as it really is awfully hot here just now, don't you think we might go back to Oloron—it's a little cooler there—and then we could picnic every now and again at the plantation? Of course you wouldn't like to go visiting just now. I suppose it wouldn't be decent? Society is so silly, and poor Alfred has only been dead about six weeks. But when you thought public opinion would stand it, we might go to England—p'raps in September—and see the Harmons, and get a few things we want from the shops in London, and then come back here for the autumn and winter."

Georgy, in this year, must have been about thirty-eight. She was short in figure, but for the last ten years her thinness had passed, with increasing happiness, to a plumpness which needed to be kept at bay with diet and exercise. Though she had shuddered with terror of park-horses as a young woman in London, and riding lessons in her early twenties had added

to her dislike of London life, here, in this easy, self-swayed existence, she had looked on horses from quite a different point of view. When she first came to the Pyrenees she rode donkeys or mules of guaranteed placidity. No one had commented, in an understandable tongue, on her appearance as she rode, which may or may not have been grotesque. A lady with the equivalent of three thousand five hundred pounds a year in francs could not look ridiculous—in France. If she came near to such a definition the staring peasants had only to be told that "Mademoiselle était Anglaise." That established at once a new facet of vision. The English of these parts were so eccentric from the local, Pyrenean standpoint that there was no norm they did not transgress—ordinarily. But they paid their bills, and the English sovereign vouched for everything.

So, by degrees, Georgy passed from a donkey to a mule, and from a mule to a Pyrenean cob of mature years and sexual indifference; and by the summer of 1881 had ceased to be frightened of horses or to fret about her appearance. Mme. de Lamelle, however, had entered the larger, adventurous life too late to become more than an uneasy, brave woman on horse-back. She was still a very good walker, and often walked up hill when Georgy rode. On expeditions of more than a mile there and a mile back she essayed stout and steady mules; but whilst they were staying at Oloron in July, 1881, they met at the hotel a fever-stricken Frenchman recovering health from a long West African sojourn. He told them of the Portuguese-African plan of "machillas," legless chairs or hammocks, suspended from a long stout pole. Ancient modifications, indeed, of this mode of transport were not unknown in the Spanish Pyrenees. Sophie obtained a picturesque form of these pole chairs from the Spanish side and found a squad of powerful young Basques, four in

number—two on, two off—who were quite willing, for a couple of months, to alternate with vintage work the carrying of this chair about the mountains; and thus, with a degree of laughter and light-heartedness hitherto foreign to her life, she explored much of the Pyrenean scenery and was very frequently at the Harmon-Veneering plantations and drug-nurseries.

These ranged from an altitude of one thousand to two thousand feet on both sides of the Gave or Vallée d'Aspe. John Harmon, with the advice and assistance of French botanists and horticulturists, had selected and obtained these sites towards the close of the 'sixties, and Mme. de Lamelle had come, in the following year, to supervise the work of the Scottish gardener and the Basque labourers. The Scots gardener had become, in course of time, a botanical explorer, and had gone on research expeditions for new drugs and medicinal herbs in Tibet, Borneo, Celebes, and the Moluccas. Now there was a Frenchman in charge at the Vallée d'Aspe, with a young Scot in subordinate direction, being trained for botanical exploration in other wild countries.

And in August, 1881, while the French curator was away on a holiday, there came Mervyn Veneering on a tour of inspection, both for his own education and for the information of John Harmon—kept just then very much at home on account of his drug business and of the affairs of Parliament. He was endeavouring, rather hopelessly, to interest both the India and Colonial Offices in the enormously important question of medical botany and vegetable drug-research in the British Empire. If quinine could intervene as effectively as it was now shown to do in the treatment of fevers, what might not be obtained in other directions, especially from the tropics and sub-tropics? The India and Colonial Offices were both yawning under his persistent and smiling questions and suggestions. It

was an annoying thing that any one with a scientific bent of mind and honest wealth behind it should have got elected for the House of Commons; otherwise he might be ignored without fear of consequences.

Mervyn's arrival at Oloron touched some hidden spring in Sophie de Lamelle's heart, some source of affection that Georgy had only mildly stimulated. She had, of course, seen him as a little boy several times at the Villa les Acacias; but childish good looks seldom attracted her attention or provoked much interest. Now there burst on her attention, with a letter of introduction from his mother, whom he had been to see previously, a very good-looking, eager young man; only nineteen years in age, it was true, but matured in looks, speech, and demeanour as though already out in the world.

Hamilton and I—(wrote Mrs. Veneering)—refrain from intruding on your widowed solitude in the Pyrenees, especially at this very hot time of the year. It is only that dear Mervyn *must* carry out Mr. Harmon's instructions, and in the course of his education "se rendre compte," as the French would say, of what is being done in medicine cultivation in the Vallée d'Aspe, a district we understand which you have been foremost in studying and recommending. What changes, indeed, my dear Sophronia, have taken place in our lives, since the days of long ago! To fancy *then* that *I* should become a successful poultry farmer and *you* the supervisor of botanical gardens! I know, of course, that your interest in Mr. Harmon's experiments is now only general, and that advancing age, bereavement, and possibly impaired health may necessitate protracted absences from the Pyrenees. I am sure Mervyn would be considerate about intruding on your time of mourning; still, as we understand that you and Miss Podsnap are sojourning quite close to the planta-

tions at Oloron, it might happen that Mervyn met you there and would regret having in hand no introduction from your old friend.

Hamilton joins me in hoping that time may, in some measure, temper the loss you have sustained.

Your affectionate Friend,

ANASTASIA.

"Loss?" queried Sophie in her thoughts as she laid down the note which had come in with her *petit déjeuner,* and sipped her cup of unsweetened, milky, frothing chocolate. "Oh! *Alfred! What* an absurd formalist the creature still is. *What* well-meaning humbug and conventionality. She must have known it was rubbish as she wrote it. And her husband, as he read it before she stuck it down, must have recalled our love passages and smiled. . . . Dear, oh dear! . . . Thirty years, fifteen years ago. Tout passe, tout casse, tout lasse . . .!"

She scribbled an invitation to Mervyn to come and eat his *déjeuner à la fourchette* with them, and dressed herself very nicely to meet him. Of course she had known all about his migration to London and his work at the Mincing Lane office; but only remembering him as a sometimes dirty and often noisy little boy at the Villa les Acacias, had hardly bestowed on him a vivid thought. John Harmon was eccentrically good and kind, almost foolishly so, except that with three hundred thousand pounds to back such pure-souled Christianity you can't seem foolish. Hamilton Veneering had long ago gone to pieces, but Harmon had not forgotten the rather original ideas about medicine he possessed in the barbarous 'fifties. Evidently this Mervyn boy was to be taken into the business in London; and in some prevision of such an event Harmon had retained the name of Veneering in the firm's device.

Mervyn appeared at their secluded table in the verandah, just as they were walking up to it. He was introduced with a wave of the hand to Georgiana Podsnap, who fell in love with him promptly, as an aunt should with a nephew. They sat down and unfolded napkins and discussed the menu; but Sophie had realised in a flash that she liked him, that he moved her cynical heart to affection. She knew or guessed that he was nineteen, but he really looked a little nearer maturity. It was, perhaps, the year in business and away from home that had ripened his appearance and taken from him the rawness of adolescence. He had had only a clouded lip the year before, but now was growing a crisp, dark-brown moustache, and evidently plied the razor twice or thrice a week on cheek and chin. His hair was dark brown with a glimmering of chestnut in its depths—so far as it had depths, for he wore it sprucely short. He had well-furnished, straight eye-brows, and his eyes had a grey iris warming at the rims into hazel; there was a good straight nose, a little thick in the middle; the chin was firm and well-moulded; the teeth, when he smiled—and he was generally smiling—were white, regular, and short. As to stature Sophie appraised it shrewdly at not far from six feet. Altogether a well-grown boy, with a nice clear complexion and a liability to blush under her examination of him, which augured an ingenuous and unspoilt nature. She glanced at his hands as he broke up a roll, plied fork and crust over trout, lifted wine or water to his lips, or smoothed back the hair over his forehead. They were capable hands, with broad knuckles, straight, spatulate fingers, long-middled, turn-backed thumbs.

"I *am* enjoying myself," he very soon said. "Of course it's awfully hot—like the tropics, I should think. . . . I expect soon there'll be a thunderstorm. But heat seems to suit me—somehow; and if the open

fields are dried up to mud colour the sheltered and watered places are ever so green and luxuriant. And all the towns are built for shade, and even the great open squares look dignified with their blazing heat. I'd never before been farther south than Calais, so here it's as though I had come to another part of the world. . . . *What* a row the cicadas make! I don't mean here, cause we're in a town and in an hotel. . . . Indeed, the hush outside seems as though everybody has gone indoors to sleep. But in the night, coming through from Paris—you know there's a moon, full moon, just now?—makes everything seem like day when it's full night—those cicadas and grasshopper things made *such* a row. It was constant, rather musical, with only slightly varying chirps. And yet it made me want to go to sleep somehow. . . . We were rather full up. . . . I travelled second class for economy—I'm awfully economical—comes of being so French, people say in England. But I liked the chaps in the second class—they were awfully jolly—commercial travellers mostly. . . . But told me such a lot of things about France I didn't know before. . . . No. I didn't stop on the way in Paris—came just right through from Calais, same as if I was coming from England. Had two hours after arriving at Paris to catch my train at the Gare d'Orléans. . . . But I saw all of Paris I could between the two stations. . . . And I'm here for three weeks! Isn't it spiffing? Why, I'll go the whole length of the Pyrenees in that time, and p'raps discover something new in its Alpine flora. But I mustn't boast, because I've never yet climbed a snow peak, and I may fall into a crévasse."

"Well," said Sophie, smiling, "we'll introduce you to the nurseries here, and take you up to about three thousand feet. I've been eleven years in this neighbourhood, but never been up to the snow yet. I'm a good walker—still; ten years ago I was simply inde-

fatigable. But I took such an interest in Harmon's plantations, was so anxious they should not fail—in case I lost my salary—I never gave much heed to the snows; and, of course, we didn't want any snow at the nurseries. Most of the things—well, two-thirds of them, at any rate, that we grow here are exotic, not Pyrenean—plants from Tibet, North-West India, the Burmese hills, North Africa, and Mexico; and snow or frost would just do for them. Have another peach? *Do!* Georgy, dear, pass him the sugar."

"How is your sister getting on, Mr. Veneering?" said Georgy.

"Dear old Jeanne? Oh, pretty well, I think. She's a little sad about losing me. You see, before I came to London last year we were so much together, more like twins. And although she's awfully practical—perhaps because she *is* so—she doesn't feel towards my younger brother, Lance, as she does towards me. She and I were born in London—I've been to see the house—near the Brompton Road—horrid part, I thought it—no history. . . . Lance, or Lancelot as he's really called, saw the light at our villa in the days when it was three miles from Calais. Mother is Catholic——"

"So am I," said Sophie, with a twinkle.

"Oh, are you? Well, I'm not going to say anything against it. It's made mother happy. But Jeanne and I somehow—well, we aren't either of us very religious. Now Lance is absolutely wrapped up in religion, believes all sorts of rubbish, pleasant and unpleasant, and wants to be a priest. Father's rather like Jeanne and me, only more cynical p'raps. But there's simply nothing Lance won't believe if the priests tell him it's so. At any rate, that's what he's going in for. He pretends he's a Fleming and not an Englishman, and is going to take up French citizenship if he can do so without undergoing military service. At any rate, he's going now to a theological college to study——"

"Let's come over to the other side, the garden side, for our coffee," interrupted Sophie.

"I say, this *is* jolly," exclaimed Mervyn, as they sat in long cane chairs and looked down into a deep, small garden with fantastic, curly, sandy paths and vivid petunias and China asters in the beds, and a little fountain playing in the middle. "But you asked about Jeanne. I think Jeanne is going to marry the son of the Maire of Calais. It means, as she says, deciding to be a Frenchwoman, for good and all; and she declares she's only yielded to his insistence because I went away to live in England. Jeanne and father don't hit it off very well. She never says very much, only keeps what he calls 'bitterly silent.' Mother doesn't know which to side with, and p'raps if Jeanne married now she wouldn't miss her as badly as she'd have done two or three years ago, when father still travelled about a good deal. But now that he seldom goes away from home, and does more to keep up the home—well—and, of course, *I'm* out of the way, that makes a difference. . . . They haven't got so many to look after."

At three o'clock they started off to see the plantations—such a cavalcade! And much laughter, though it was so hot. Mervyn had got a horse out of the hotel stables, rather a gaunt beast, very anxious to graze whenever an opportunity offered, and yet inclined to level a kick at Georgy's sedate cob. Mme. de Lamelle travelled in her compromise between a sedan chair and a machilla, with her squad of Basques carrying the pole on their shoulders. It was a six-mile journey, but there was much interest by the way—rough paths which did not follow the dusty, public roads. The plantations were in duplicate, separated by the stream of the valley, the Aspe. They were united by a bridge which led out of the little village of Lurbe, on the south side of the Gave. At this time—mid-August—

the little stream was very scanty, but, in the spring, with the melting snows, the turbid waters rose nearly to the inception of the arch. Now they were crystal clear and sidled musically between the grey boulders and the gravel.

They crossed the bridge to the north side, and a very stolid young Glaswegian received them in front of the dwelling-house and managerial office. "Mr. Snaith," said Sophie, descending from her sedan chair, "this is Mr. Mervyn Veneering, whose father gave such a great enlargement to the firm for which you work. Mr. Mervyn comes here partly on a holiday, partly to make himself acquainted with these plantations, as he is a clerk in the Mincing Lane house, who has had the further advantage of a French education. I am sorry Monsieur Faidherbe is away on his holiday, but I am sure you will be able to show him all he wants to see."

"A've already hearrd all aboot him from London. . . . Bid you welcome, sir."

"Thank you," said Mervyn. "I can see already the gardens are going to be wonderfully interesting. I'm here to learn, not to criticise."

Then he went to help Georgy, whose cob was blundering up too close to his own rancorous horse; who, having got hold of some particularly juicy herb had no desire to share it. However, the Basques, having disposed of Mme. de Lamelle's "machilla," threw themselves on the two horses and led them away to the stables. The party did not stay long in the plainly furnished house, but promised to return for a cup of tea before the homeward journey at six. So there were barely two hours in which to see the twin plantations.

The northern half of the gardens was the more interesting by reason of its southern exposure and its sheltering forests of chestnuts and pines which shut off the cold, northern winds and the danger of frosts. Here, in the terraces, grew many a plant of Mexican

and Chilian, Australian and Californian habitat, and a few things from Asia Minor and the Himalayas, from mountainous Syria, and even Algeria. The heat of July and August had imparted a sereness to foliage; flowering was mostly over; seeding was in some cases evident. The romance that lay over these terraces and water channels was the hidden potency of the remedies, or, in sufficient strength, the poison of these little herbs, these shrubs, trees, bulbs, and creepers; for what is medicine in the minute dose may be deadly poison in a greater mass. Newly-known, anciently-used, and forgotten medicines were to be derived from their barks, their leaves, twigs, tubers, roots, seeds, calyces, honey, berries, and fleshy fruits, or rind of fruits, or kernels, or the swaything of the kernels, or the skins of the seeds. Some of these plants furnished remedies known to the Hebrews of Bible actuality, or to the Greeks under Pericles or in the times of Aristotle and Alexander; to the Romans of the Golden or the Silver Ages; to the Saracens of the Crusades, or to the Paris doctors of the revival of learning. Others were sent from New Zealand by John Wilfer; from South Africa by John Harmon's correspondents; or they had first sojourned in the gardens of Chacely Priory, and Harmon had transferred them here to see if the stronger sunshine of the Pyrenees strengthened their potency or made a European cultivation just possible. Sophie and Georgy were neither of them botanists, but both had acquired a quick sense of gardening. Sophie, especially, said things of value in criticising growth, emplacement, shelter, soil, moisture, or aridity. Mervyn's enthusiasm for all he saw was a little excessive. The peeps at distant glimpses of snow in the vast background of the Pyrenees, of pine forests purple blue in the shade, chestnut woods intensely green in sunlight, of trees with strange fruits in the foreground, aloes with fantastic flower-stalks, creep-

ers, cacti, leguminous shrubs still blooming, heaths, laurels, colocynths, and asclepiads sent him into indiscriminating raptures. He did not notice how the *Ipomœa purpurea* had faded, how the arborescent *Apocynum* had wilted in the vivid sunlight, how birds had robbed the *Casimiroa* of its precious seed pods; or the Jaborandi of its juicy fruit.

Sophie insisted on his noting these checks to success, because she laid stress on his remembering that the gardens did not yet pay a profit on their upkeep. They might do so when some of the new remedies were popularised in our enlarging pharmacopœia; but the gardens, if they were to supply a really great industry, must be extended. Local proprietors were holding tight; there was a general idea that John Harmon was "richissime," and should be bled; he was not French, and therefore must be made to suffer. The French Government was still unalive to his purposes, which were international, not purely British. Here he had found an ideal climate for his purpose, and in most places the right varieties of soil; but the gardens must be extended, stretch downwards to a thousand feet above sea-level, upwards to three thousand feet. "Or, let us say, seven hundred and fifty metres," added Sophie. "I have already told Mr. Harmon it irritates the French authorities talking about 'feet' and 'yards'; they will do far more for you if you grasp and adopt the metric system and make your reckonings in that. I know we shall cling to our absurd weights and measures till ruin positively stares us in the face. . . . You must try to follow the metric system, Mr. Snaith. . . . Purge your mind of British prejudice. . . . About those Mexican shrubs, you mentioned. In Mexico, I am told, they will only grow at 6,000 feet above sea-level. Here they ought to be suited along the top of our plantations at three thousand feet, if we can purchase that degree of extension. Mervyn—if I

may call you by your Christian name, *tout court*—there are some points you should note in what Mr. Snaith has been saying about snails and caterpillars, the aphis of the vine disease, and wire worms. We might get him to jot down the main points in writing; but it would be as well to discuss them thoroughly with Mr. Snaith before you go and before you draw up any report for Mr. Harmon. And, better still, to stay on here till Monsieur Faidherbe returns, and hear what *he* has to say. He has been in Mexico and Cochin China, but he is quite affable.

"Now, before we leave this afternoon, you ought to see the beds of *Œnothera odorata* near the house. Their flowers don't come out properly till an hour before sunset—just about the time the sun goes behind the mountains. I think to-morrow you'd better come up here with your bag of night things and stay for a week and thoroughly explore the gardens—facing north and facing south. Both Snaith"—(she said with a nod towards the matter-of-fact Glaswegian)—"and Faidherbe are worth talking to, and good-natured about answering questions. Then when your report is drafted in the rough, show it to me before you leave the neighbourhood, and I will tell you where I think it's silly, or inadequate, or too rapturous. You mustn't pay too much attention to the scenery. . . . . Georgy, dear. You've torn your skirt behind at the gathers, and quite innocently you're walking about a perfect sight, such as no lady should show herself. It would be dangerous to ride back like that. I shall just have time to mend it and adjust it if you come upstairs with me whilst our escort are bringing up the horses and getting the machilla ready."

CHAPTER X

CAMBRIDGE: 1882-1883

October 10, 1882.

DEAREST JEANNE,—

I AM at Cambridge, as the post-mark of the envelope should inform you; but I am only in lodgings, so far; and as I do not like them and hope to leave them daily for St. Peter's College, I do not give you the address. You might send your answer and get mother to address her letters to the care of the firm in Mincing Lane: they will know where I am to be found. I am going, at Christmas time, to give up my rooms at 19, Villiers Street—bien à regret—for I have been happy there, and in the course of two years have quite grown to like "Rosalie," as Miriam calls her. But Miriam herself is moving to other and less Bohemian quarters, nearer her new theatre, some place which she can better make into a "home." Meantime, she and her company are going on a series of visits to the leading towns with their enormously successful piece, *The Vintage*—you saw it when you came over in the summer—and before Christmas they may come to Cambridge. Mr. Harmon suggests that when I give up 19 and the rough-tongued but kindly Rosalie (who is actually talking of moving "into the country—somewhere Edgware way") I should have a room at his house in Wigmore Street, till I have finished my University stage. I shall be at Cambridge—assuming I am not plucked next week in this "previous"—for about three or four years. And I expect I shall go

down to Chacely from time to time to work in the herb gardens and the drug factory. When I get into the University I must spend nine terms there—at least—to qualify for a degree. This means a residence at Cambridge of about six to seven months out of each year; in addition to which I might want to put in another month or six weeks in the long vacation for studies in the Botanical Gardens here, and in the laboratories.

Then I shall want—say twice a year—to run over to Calais to see you and mother, and a fortnight now and again for the Gave d'Aspe; so it would be waste of money to keep on my rooms in Villiers Street, especially now that Miriam is going and Rosalie is beginning to have tender thoughts of Edgware—a most uninteresting place, I should have thought, and far from perfect country.

About my examination here. It began last Monday at the Guildhall and lasted till Friday. It was *much* stiffer than I thought, and I am very uneasy as to the result. Of course, ever since I put myself at King's College I have been aware, more or less, of the subjects I should be examined in—The New Testament, Plato's and Xenophon's books in Greek, or similar writers, Virgil's poetry and various kinds of Latin prose, Greek and Latin grammar, that tiresome old Paley and his very unsound and plausible "Evidences," euclid, arithmetic, and algebra.

The preparation for all this has been rather distracting, very much against the grain, the trend of my own natural inquiries being almost entirely in the direction of biology, pre-history, and modern languages. I have always had an interest in Latin—since I was twelve and Monsieur Mercadet used to talk to us about Diez's "Grammaire des Langues Romanes," and its translation and amplification by Gaston Paris. But the Latin that since then attracted me was the possible Latin spoken in France in the sixth, seventh, eighth cen-

turies, when it was dissolving into French and other Romance languages. Latin of the classical period I thought odious from its absolutely crazy construction —requiring "parsing," I should think, then—when it was spoken—as well as now. I cannot believe, somehow, that it was ever—this classical Latin—more than an artificial *literary* language. It simply could not have been spoken in the home, anywhere, when you were in a hurry to get at the main facts and couldn't wait till the end of the sentence to know whether the dog was mine or yours or black or white.

I notice, by the bye, with pleasure, that at Cambridge they are beginning to adopt the *right* pronunciation of Latin, not the barbarously unreal, Elizabethan pronunciation which is still followed by the English in Greek, partly as an act of defiance of Popish customs. As to Greek I have attempted to evade Plato in favour of The Gospel according to St. Matthew—in New Testament Greek. I cannot stand Plato; it is all so beside the mark. I mean we have got so far beyond the poor dear in our researches and discoveries, and his "Socrates" is such a figure of speech. But I won't waste letter-space on these arguments. I take a much greater interest in Xenophon. At any rate he *did* something, he made some astonishing journeys for those days, though like all the writers of his time, and for many centuries afterwards, he told you nothing of the ethnology or botany of the regions he traversed.

I expect I have done pretty fairly over the euclid and arithmetic; but I felt flummoxed over the algebra. I am always told algebra is absolutely essential to astronomers and engineers. At any rate it seems to afford them gratification, and checks criticism of their theories. It ought also to fill with rapture the puzzle-prize editors of magazines. But I never see how it is going to help a plain citizen like myself, bent—chiefly —on the study of botany and chemistry, and biology in

general. I left several of the algebraic questions unanswered. They were the last of the five days' tortures, and perhaps the examiners may assume that my health failed.

Isn't it *extraordinary* that at this preliminary examination no attention should be paid to the things I *really* know—for I am far from a duffer—the botany, chemistry, history, modern languages?

Now that's enough about *me*. Next to myself—which I do really feel I ought to say at this moment, for I shall be *bitterly* disappointed if I fail, and Mr. Harmon thinks I have been idle or stupid—I want to hear that all is well with you. Has Menelek—as we used to call him—proposed, and in that case have you accepted him? As soon as I know I have passed this beastly examination, and can go straight ahead at Cambridge with the studies that really interest me, that are *really* important and modern, I shall think most of you.

Your loving
MER.

Villa les Acacias,
October 15, 1882.

MY DARLING BOY,—

We were so thrilled with delight, mother and I, yes, et Gaston aussi, le Ménélek indomptable, as we used to call him, and even our rather—in these days—sombre Papa, to learn from your telegram that you had passed—and so creditably. The joy of knowing it has quite disturbed my English and as I am at last fiancée à Gaston, je me trouve de plus en plus disposée à ne me servir que du français pour exprimer mes affections les plus tendres. *Cher* petit! Comme je t'*aime*, de plus en plus, d'un amour bien différent de celui dont je contemple Gaston; et je m'en amourache—de lui—avec passion. Mais avec toi: c'est presque maternel. Je t'ai connu si petit, si bien moins que moi, quelquefois,

même, dans notre jeunesse, si frêle, si souffrant. . . . No, I won't go on, in this letter. But now I am going to marry a Frenchman I think, when I *am* married, I shall refuse any more to talk or to write English. I shall say we were Flemish and have become French. There is much in Papa's life I have dimly guessed and cannot approve of, but I have grown more tender towards him of late; he is so broken; and I do feel at one time, at one remote time, he did try so hard to do something—for England—and was so scurvily treated. My own darling brother now is going to take up the tale. I believe—and God knows I hope—you dear boy, you are going to be the future glory of this firm. You are going to carry out to the full the good ideas our poor father had in his youth before he became besotted with Stock Exchange speculations, and gambling, *and* the Lammles.

Well, you will be glad of my news which has almost blossomed at the same time as yours. If you are twenty, I am twenty-two—and some months more, which is thought quite mature for marriage in France. And mon bien chéri Gaston is twenty-seven. I believe he could not have married without his father's consent till he was twenty-five; and although my future father-in-law has given his approval for the marriage in due form, et même très galamment, I'm not *quite* so sure he would have approved a few years earlier, when Papa's affairs did not seem so settled and satisfactory. Of course, it has really been our mother who has built us up again. We should never forget that, or be tempted—as I often am—to mock at her Early Victorian ways and funny little hypocrisies. Something instinctively good and prudent and English in her composition came to the top after the financial break-down in 1864.

Papa is going to give me a thousand pounds, and Mamma will make over funds to provide me with a

steady *hundred pounds* a year, which is *a considerable sacrifice* for *her* to make. But I dare say—une fois mariée—I shall be able to make it up to her, somehow. I think Monsieur le Maire—as Gaston's father is—was rather disappointed when told of the very modest contribution I was making to Goston's resources. But I was quite firm—*insisted* on seeing him myself—which he also thought rather disturbingly "English." I told him *if* I could only marry by unduly limiting my parents' means, I would remain *un*married (I expect I should have eloped soon afterwards with Gaston, for I am really very much in love with him). Once married I mean to work *so hard* that I shall soon atone for having come with a poor dowry. I think M. le Maire feels that. Like most French people he has an exaggerated respect for the English. He can't believe there are really English "poor" people—many of them much more miserably poor than the French, partly because the climate is worse—and although he had guessed that Papa had had a severe financial crisis years ago, he thought even in the wreck of his fortunes he—having been a member of Parliament—must still have remained moderately rich.

However, all that is settled now, and I am bursting with happiness (entre nous deux, soit il dit). I am really intensely in love with Gaston, though I try to be cold and calm—simply because it is my supposed coldness and placid demeanour which so fascinate him—dear simple thing. For although he has served so much in French Africa and in the French army generally, he *is* simple. He has, however, a very practical side and intends to leave the army and settle in Picardy, perhaps not far from this Calais of ours, and develop some potteries in which his father is interested. He has also got some rather 'cute ideas about velocipedes, and making them much easier to ride.

I ought, perhaps, to say that I am going to become a

Catholic to make things pleasanter for Gaston. Nobody asked me to—particularly. But, here in France, it will make things much more comfortable, and Catholicism has made mother ever so much happier. I can never forget what Père Duparquet has done for us, and it will gratify him. You and I may think what we please, inwardly, and one form of Christianity doesn't very much differ from another in essentials. Of course that horrid boy, Lance, will think it is due to *his* influence. I cannot imagine how he came to be our brother: he is so unlike us. Was it because *we* were born in England? And yet I believe Mamma is fonder of him than she is of us. He is getting on for eighteen, and is now definitely studying for the priesthood. I have never liked him—nor does Gaston—nor have you. Mais Maman en radote. I simply must close this now, but I shall insist on your coming to the wedding. We will choose a date in between your University courses, and if you don't turn up, *il n'y aura pas de mariage.* Till then, my darling,

Your loving sister,

JEANNE.

Gaston t'envoie toutes les amitiés possibles. Il se rappelle de toi quand tu étais encore à l'école ici et que, lui, il était en permission d'Alger. Quelquefois, quand il veut me taquiner, il me raconte qu'il m'a choisi plutôt pour mes frères, ma mère, mon "stock," que pour des raisons personnelles. Mais je reste calme, car je suis convaincue que tu l'aimeras.

I have written specially to Mrs. Harmon to tell her about Gaston and me, because they were so awfully kind to me last summer and think such a lot of you. Do you know, I often, in my mind, date the recovery of Mamma from the time Mr. Harmon used to come over to see her at Calais and you and I—you can't

remember—used to run in out of the garden, hideously dirty, and stare at him!

One day in later November, not long after Mervyn had got installed in Peterhouse, he was passing the exterior of the theatre when he saw the startling announcement: "Miss Clements and the Original Company of the Globe Theatre, London, in *The Vintage,* December 6 to December 16. Seats can now be booked."

A day or two afterwards he had a letter from Miriam saying that, as their tenure of The Globe would be coming to an end with November, and as their new Embankment Theatre would not be ready for the new piece till March, they had decided to take *The Vintage* round the provinces on tour. They all felt sick of London, though the play still went well. Probably it would have quite a revival in the country. The Embankment Theatre would be finished enough for rehearsals by the end of January. Her company—on full pay—would be rehearsing all February the successor to *The Vintage.* From the 1st to the 10th of March every one was to have ten days' clear holiday on full pay; then five days rehearsing, and the Embankment Theatre was to open its doors to the public in March 15, 1883. "I am really starting this tour with Cambridge to see at the same time how *you* are getting on, and also because I have rather a sentimental liking for the place, having had a shot there at higher things in education for myself. But I have not a very clear idea whether the ten days' stay will be profitable; it will commence after your autumn term closes, and there may be no audiences."

But her apprehensions were not justified by events. Many men were staying on till over the 16th December to wind up uncompleted studies, and also because home

festivities would not commence till a day or two before Christmas. The nastiness of winter weather had not begun—or rather after a few days of bitter cold in November and a week of miserable rain, the first half of that December seemed almost spring-like in its pale sunshine and quiet air.

Miriam's ten days proved an uproarious success. Her company naturally left behind it in London its numerous body of supers—French peasants and gardes-champêtres, francs-tireurs (the period was the autumn of 1870); and proposed to recruit these supernumeraries from the people on the books of the Cambridge Theatre. But Mervyn, two or three days before the first performances, suggested the enlistment of eager student volunteers, himself included. Miriam—a little doubting, half amused—assented. And every performance went with a rush, with a vividness, a reality (in spite of atrocious pronunciation of the few French words that were deemed essential) that quite outdid the London rendering. Matinées had to be given to satisfy those who had been crowded out from night attendance. A few people, even, ran down from London because of a paragraph in the *Times*, to see a first-class London company, with University undergraduates doing the crowds and the parts which had but few sentences to utter.

The University authorities viewed this flutter of gaiety, novelty, and notoriety a little sourly; and Mervyn was cautioned by his tutor and by the master of his College—they had intended to be much severer in tone till they saw his pleasant, eager face. But in those days the University was still a little prejudiced against the Theatre as a rival of the Church; and although the character of Miss Clements was seemingly above criticism—she acknowledged her age to be thirty-four, which was equivalent then to her calling herself sixty at the present time—and it was hinted

that her father was a well-known clergyman and a possible bishop—the sallies of Mrs. Venables were a *little* indecorous, *if* correctly repeated and understood, and the influence of Mr.—Mr.—Harry—er—Sanders—why, surely *that* was the young man who had been rusticated at Oxford, years ago—slightly hump-backed, eh? high-shouldered, at any rate. And with a biting and disturbing wit; the adapter of the present piece they were playing, and—it was said—the author of the one in prospect? Mr. Sanders's sayings were having *far* too much vogue, and though Mervyn declared he was in reality very kind of heart, his—er—influence was—er—not what was desired for *undergraduates* in their first or second year.

However, Miriam's ten days came to an end on December 16, and soon afterwards the undergraduates dispersed to their Christmas home-gatherings, none the worse for the enormous frolic occasioned by her Cambridge interlude—rather the better, if anything, in practical knowledge of the theatre. Mervyn regained the shaken good opinion by his usual capacity for work. He stayed on at Cambridge through Christmas, left for a few days to attend Jeanne's wedding, and was back once more at his College in time for the opening of the Lent term in January, 1883.

He realised that if he was to carry out his Cambridge studies satisfactorily, and yet justify the allotment of his salary from Mr. Harmon's firm—£250 a year—in addition to his family allowance of £150, annually, during his College courses—he must give up to office work in London or abroad the periods between his University residence. Cambridge would get the better of the allotment in time by the office allowing him to spend a month of the long vacation there, studying botany.

He consequently became a much overworked and at times rather irritable young man. Between mid-

January and mid-March, mid-April and mid-June; and again from the end of September to the early part of December he was resident at Peterhouse, working desperately hard to prepare for and ultimately to pass the examinations for the tripos in Natural Science. He also generally came to Cambridge for August, so as to work quietly at the Botanical Gardens and in the libraries. Cambridge was at its quietest then, for in July, though the Easter term was well over, there were tiresome festivities and parties.

As against these terms of residence at Peterhouse, he spent March to April in London, working at the office and availing himself of the oft-times silent hospitality of Wigmore Street. So, also, in June and July he was at Mr. Harmon's disposal, either to assist with correspondence and the supervision of experiments in Gloucestershire or to visit and report on the Pyrenees Gardens; though these last were usually seen in September. In September, also, there was office work to be done, and likewise in December-January. And in between all this strenuousness he found an occasional week or five days to visit his parents or his sister in the north of France. Harmon was kind, but punctilious; the more so, because he found himself naturally more drawn towards this young Veneering in sympathy and fellow-feeling than towards his own two sons.

Reggie was growing up a good-looking, stalwart young fellow, but with a sullen, dissatisfied disposition. He cared absolutely nothing for "science," and resented extremely his father's disposition of his wealth. For a man to have a capital of "more than"—(I cannot find corroboration of the "more than")—three hundred thousand pounds, and to leave half of that sum invested, more or less inextricably, in the finances of a "drug" firm seemed to Reggie a kind of lower middle-class lunacy. Father may have come from little short of artisan ancestry on one side, but then so

had the Plasseys and the Podgemores, already in the peerage, because they had played their cards properly and been generous to the right people and the right party. But father, though he had been some years in the House of Commons, seemed never friends with the big men who had honours and posts to give away. He was always mad about reforms that would benefit other people; and, moreover, here he had been for two years, at least, making an undue fuss about a young bounder from goodness knows where in France, with a dubious father who had run away from England ages ago because he had got into financial trouble—and there was the aforesaid bounder allotted a bedroom at their scarcely-used, mucked-up town house—more a museum than a house—and being backed at Cambridge till you might almost have believed there was something rum about his exact parentage, some by-blow of father's in his youth, before he married mother.

Reggie conceived himself very hardly dealt with when he had discussed the disposition of his life with his father after he had gone to Eton. He was given then to understand that whilst at school, and after all his reasonable school expenses were paid, he would be allowed "pocket-money," to the extent of a hundred pounds yearly; that when he passed from Eton to University or Military College he should have double this amount to spend on himself and his tastes; and that when he was twenty-one he would be given five hundred a year till his father's death when he, like all his brothers and sisters, would inherit twenty thousand pounds apiece, in addition to anything their mother might choose to leave them.

So far as his father was concerned he intended each one of his children to be treated alike: each should be left twenty thousand pounds at his death; but before then the two boys, on attaining their majority at twenty-one, were to receive an income of five hundred

pounds a year, and the girls three hundred. If they wanted more than that they must attain it through work: work in his firm—in its branch offices or plantations, or work in any other respectable career.

This decision was made known to Reggie in response to his fretful inquiries when he was sixteen. John, being then only a school-boy of fourteen or fifteen, scarcely worried about the future; he only resembled his elder brother in being most perversely indifferent to chemistry or drugs, and shared his opinion that father with at one time a control over "a pot of money"—three hundred thousand pounds—had acted most unfairly towards his children in not dropping all debasing business and applying his fortune to the ample life of a country gentleman, and making ample provision for his two sons to lead a similar life in their turn without any effort on their part.

John Harmon's disappointment in his sons only gradually dawned on his imagination. He was exceptionally indulgent to youth; wanted it to shape itself unfettered; if his lads had severally objected to the cramped and old-fashioned education of a public school, he would gladly have released them and let them choose their own medium of education. But he so constantly looked back on his own past, the risks *he* had run of under-education, the efforts *he* had had to make not to sink down altogether into the mire of existence that he was somewhat conservatively inclined in their case. Many men shook their heads (in remembrance of their own past) over the fruitless years of boyhood spent at the crack schools of their country; familiarity with certain games, with a certain argot, certain cuts of clothes, certain fashions and frolics, but very little real knowledge of the world and its many problems, with honest, money-making careers. Such knowledge, if they had gained it, had come through stress of circumstances after their release

from school: their education had begun in their twenties, not in their teens.

Neither Reggie nor John, however, found much fault with Eton or Harrow in the early 'eighties, John even less than Reggie. John was of slighter physique than his elder brother, not ardently fond of rough games—only did enough of them to escape opprobrium. But, like Reggie, he had a strange dislike to commerce and to chemistry, thought botany of a practical nature "low," worthy at most of study by the lesser clergy or unmarriageable, spectacled girls of the lower middle-class. He wished his own career to lie in literature, but literature of a recondite character; he would be a poet without the vulgarity of rhyme; something "dynamic," nothing of the stale type of old Tennyson or Coventry Patmore, or even too much like Swinburne. He would sing of strange emotions, unavowable in plain language, of uncouth, subtle or dangerous plants—that was a poet's only use for botany—cactuses or upas trees, throttling seaweeds or poisonous cucurbits. It was insupportable that father should belong to a City firm which supplied shops and stores with *medicines!* And father was a Liberal—John and his brother were embittered Conservatives.

Mrs. Harmon laughed at much of this peevishness, though with a slight leaven of uneasiness. Her girls said "For shame!", and preferred Mervyn's personal appearance and tennis play, dragging—without cause, as Reggie complained—his unmentioned name into the discussions and comparisons. Bella was troubled with misgivings, now and again, as to whether her husband might not be doing more to interest their boys in his gigantic business, might not move a little less obviously in the pushing-on of young Veneering. And yet, urged thereto by her husband and her eldest daughter and her own good nature, she came to Cambridge for this

"May week" of 1883—held like other "May weeks" at the beginning of June. Mervyn would not be rowing or cricketing, but he was acting in the Amateur Dramatic Society's performance, taking part in gymnasium displays, a fencing contest, and a Volunteer review. And Hetty seemed to want her to go.

Hetty at this period was nineteen, the eldest of her children, and the handsomest of her girls. She was taller than her mother by several inches, and her demeanour had a tendency towards gravity, not because she was of a religious cast of mind or a prig or anything else that was near disagreeable, but because she was puzzled over the enigma of life and sensitively acute to suffering, and aware of its existence even in North Gloucestershire, aware even there of a curious lack of justice in the dispositions of Divine Providence. She had found an attractiveness about this Veneering boy when he was eighteen and nineteen. When he was twenty-one and at Cambridge as a student, more developed in mind and outlook, more settled in becoming manliness than the majority of his companions, she knew she was in love with him, and perhaps showed it in her eyes or the tones of her voice. *He* then knew that he was in love with *her,* and in a lesser degree with her sisters, and that he ardently desired to marry her and would work with additional stress and energy to justify the proposal. And her eyes, though no word was spoken, told him she would wait, and that she was demurely content with his decision.

Meantime, in this particular June week of 1883, she boated, danced, and walked with him as much as the circumstances of the time permitted; she went with her mother to the theatrical performance, wherein he missed his cue when their eyes met. She watched him fence with varying success, and tacitly admired his well-knit body in the wearisome gymnastics. She saw

him as a Volunteer, and considered that he "made" the uniform, rather than that it added any confirmation to *his* soldierly figure.

Perhaps the most delightful surprise of all that June week—at quite the end of it—was the arrival of Jeanne and her husband. Formally announced he was Monsieur le Capitaine Gaston Dudeffrand. Introduced to the University authorities and then to Mervyn's student friends, he lingered for several years as "Doody" in Cambridge memories. His boldly broken English was their delight, equally with his genial acceptance of their shocking French. Jeanne had had such doubts as to whether she could bring him and whether he could get permission from his still jealous military authorities, that she had said nothing of her purpose to her brother. But here they were—Jeanne looking "perfectly lovely"—as Hetty declared with real enthusiasm; Gaston fatuously happy, winsomely good-looking, but measuring two inches shorter than Mervyn, who now definitely stood up six feet in his stockings.

What a treat good-looking people are! How they ought to be encouraged where the generality is so commonplace, and so many are still positively ugly and misshapen. Bella Harmon at forty-two had not yet been touched with sorrow or by any great anxiety. She was only five feet three in height, three or four inches shorter than Hetty. Her chocolate-brown hair had no grey threads, her violet-blue eyes still sparkled, she still blushed with excitement or pleasure, her figure avoided stoutness without obvious constriction, her costume had the extreme of fashion restrained by good taste. Hetty was lovely, opulently lovely in a rather large and quiet way. Jeanne was a handsome blend between brunette and blonde, and as tall as Hetty. Gaston, to a woman's eyes, was rather disturbingly good-looking. He gave them the feeling then that if

he hadn't fallen in love with a good woman who loved him, he might have gone to the bad for love. Possibly he would not. He would merely have ceased to be good-looking and attractive in a woman's eyes; for good looks, when probed to their essence, are as often as not a good spirit looking out through ordinary eyes, nose, and hair. If the good spirit turns bad, the hair comes out or loses its colour, the nose thickens or turns red, the eyes cease to dance with light or to glow with fire, the smooth brow is furrowed.

Mervyn I have already described. He was mainly a sound, wholesome, eager youth; insistence on details of eye and skin-colour, moustache and eyelashes would make him seem a fop—a condition he would have died rather than incur.

Well, here was Bella, the young-minded, quite forgetting the nascent trouble of her own sons, happy that her eldest daughter should have found happiness, happy above all to think that the handsome, well-married Jeanne, the good-looking and noteworthy Mervyn were almost the direct results of dear old John's goodness of heart and kindly discernment. [She thought herself an orthodox Church of England Christian, but in reality she worshipped John Harmon as Father, Son, and Holy Ghost: women with good husbands were like that in those days, before Lady Diana Drake-Tollemache and Marola Pounce-Hughes had set other fashions to the tune of constant cigarettes, cocaine injections, and complexion painting.]

Here, then, was Bella feeling very glad indeed she had come to Cambridge for May week; here was Hetty, resting at last after a year of anxiety to know by eye-glance and hand-pressure that her love was returned; here was Mervyn in the most simmering happiness over his career, his choice of mate, his sister and her choice of husband—over the weather, over his having beaten Jevons in the fencing bout, his success

on the amateur stage, where his good looks and his love-making—with one eye on Hetty in the stalls—atoned for his forgetfulness of fatuous sentences; here were Jeanne and Gaston, Jeanne mainly happy because she was respectable and her people had all become so, and Gaston was her husband; and Gaston, radiant with the new joys of marriage and his coming release from the army, and with surprise that the dour England of his imagination was so beautiful and so jolly. Here they were, this party of five people of the middle class, in the early 'eighties, at the beginning of the sweet English summer, when a Liberal Government in power seemed in a pleasant way to have caught the Jingo fever, and to be wearing the Beaconsfield robes, and no longer scowling at Imperial extension; when our railways had become wholly efficient yet not overcrowded; when you could walk about the broad and narrow streets of Cambridge heedless of vehicles; when you could embrace Darwinism, as expounded by Huxley, without a doubt; yet when the Heads of Colleges held family prayers, lasting a full half hour; and when it meant social obloquy in all classes if you fell in love with your deceased wife's sister and wanted her to be a mother to your wife's children.

CHAPTER XI

1885-1887

MR. HARMON!" cried Mervyn excitedly, bursting without announcement into the partners' room, at the Mincing Lane office, one morning in June, 1885. "I've passed as a B.A. Telegram from my tutor at Peterhouse. Isn't it kind of him to let me know? Passed quite creditably, he says. Here's his telegram"—(John Harmon puts down a chemical analysis he was conning and takes up the telegram)—"Natural Science, of course; I worked at nothing else; but I *did* work at that—as you know—and especially at botany and chemistry. . . . I thought my botany would stand me in good stead. . . . I owe a lot to Babington. . . . I'm so glad . . . because it's some little return for all you've done for me——" He stopped, his cheeks flushed, confused like most Englishmen with the shame of showing emotion.

Harmon put down the telegram and held out his hand to shake Mervyn's, saying as he did so: "Well, I *am* glad! I *hate* gush, but, you know, Melvin—now what whim of the brain brings back *that* old name? I mean, you know, Mervyn—my dear lad—I *am* so glad. It seems to justify me for my interference with this firm. The news will cheer up your father—and poor old Wilfer, who's grown very fond of you. I'm afraid *he'll* never sit in *that* chair again. I'm going along to see him presently, when I've got through the morning's business. 'Fraid you'll have to stop and do the correspondence. . . . Left a sheaf of notes for you.

There's a letter from your friend and admirer, Mme. de Lamelle, about the Pyrenees extension. . . . She's seen the Préfet. . . . Marvellous woman! Who'd guess she was—what is it? Sixty-four? Must be. . . . Know she was thirty-nine in 1860. Ten years older than I am, by the bye. I'm—alas!—fifty-four. Don't *feel* old, but I dare say soon shall, especially as I'm virtually the sole working partner just now. This is a situation which can't go on with our huge extension of work. *Must* talk it over with you—and—and—one or two other people. Of course I intend to make you a partner—to justify the name—but precocious as you are, I don't feel I ought to till your twenty-fifth birthday. Too sad, isn't it, that neither of my boys care a hang about this grand business—drugs? . . . Cure for all our ills! . . . To think there's to be no further Harmon in the firm after I'm gone—unless you'll change your surname to Harmon? But no. Much better stick to Veneering and justify your father——"

"Mr. Harmon! . . . You know. . . . You know I . . . I . . . I want to marry Hetty. . . . Shouldn't have *dared* to say so—only—for this morning's news—and because of the—the—things you've said. . . . Of course . . . I . . . haven't exactly spoken to Hetty. At least, we sort of agreed I shouldn't speak till I was a little older, and . . . and . . . had done something . . . got my degree. . . . Oh, I could simply hug my tutor this morning, and the examiners. I was in *such* a funk I shouldn't pass this term, and should have to go on . . . wasting time——"

"Well, let me get a word in, hang it all! As you're going to ask my consent—and approval—I suppose? Well, dear lad, I'm not exactly blind or deaf, nor is my dear Bella. We've more or less guessed the last two years how Hetty felt towards you, and how you felt towards Hetty. But we thought it was just one of

those things that settled themselves, didn't require *our* interference. Hetty must have made up her mind about you, or she'd have accepted one or other of the chaps who've tried to hang about her in the country. And she's been learning botany, too. So's Elizabeth, so's Helen. Miss Mitcham's an excellent teacher. Astonishing how different they are to the boys. But it appears no one ever placed a ban on Botany at girls' schools, though I expect what they're taught *there* is sometimes poor stuff. . . . 'Our English Flora,' and so on. But my girls, of course, have got our gardens and houses at Chacely. . . . However, I'm extra discursive this morning, and a thousand things are pressing. I want to see old Wilfer before lunch, and I've got at least five letters to dictate to you before I go. Let's wind up the other great question by saying this: that I don't *disapprove*—no, hang it all! I'll be natural and not governed by forms. I'm downright glad you and Hetty want to marry. *Downright glad.* As a reward for your B.A. I—we—*must* remember her mother—we don't mind your considering yourselves engaged to one another straight away, if *that* gives you any satisfaction. . . . 'Spect it will; But there mustn't be any idea of marriage before you've done your two years' travel and been made a partner. There! Will *that* satisfy you? If so, shake!" —(they shake hands)—"And then let's drop all further love-palaver and get to those letters. One of them I *must* sign before I go. Here it is:—'Madison Corness, Esq.' The address is 'Golden Cross Hotel, Charing Cross. June 12, 1885. Dear Sir. I was interested in your letter, and from it to learn that you'—comma—'the writer'—comma—'are the son of'—am I going too fast?—'the son of such a distinguished American chemist, with'—er—er—'with whose writings—and reports'—*think* I've read 'em somewhere—'writings and reports I am fa-

miliar. I shall be in London this summer till Parliament rises in August, and '—er—er—' though a busy man '—no, you'd better write—' a *very* busy man—could see you most week-day mornings either here at this address in the City or, if you preferred it, at my house, No. 1, Wigmore Street, Cavendish Square. If you are a tolerably early riser, indeed, you might like to come and breakfast with me at nine o'clock at that address. We could have an hour's talk afterwards, if you choose a Saturday morning.' Um. . . . Um. . . . You might go on like this, it will be simpler. 'Suppose, to make things clearer, I propose to you *next* Saturday, breakfast at nine sharp, 1, Wigmore Street? If this is inconvenient, please make your own proposition, only if you come to see me in the City I am very much pressed for time when there. I should like to make your visit to England '—comma—'to London '—comma—' pleasant. We can talk all that over when we meet. Yours very truly, etc.' . . . Got that? Well, then, the other four letters are all to be answers to these: Mrs. McGowan, Edinburgh, Captain Edward Stevenson—he's sent us some samples of native drugs from Nyasaland—the Revd. Aldraith—that's as far as I can make it out—Aldraith Cornish, Tamatave, Madagascar—dried specimens of plants—and Messrs. Richthofen of Something-or-other Platz—*hate* this old German print—Berlin. You can devise the answers—none of them are very important—and I shall be able to judge by them of your growing ability. Fancy you're already a partner, two years hence, and think how you might be inclined to answer them then! I'll look through the letters and sign them some time or other to-day or to-morrow. Now, let me have the first to sign for post before I go now. Quick! I'll be putting back these specimens while you do it."

Having telegraphed thanks to his tutor at Peter-

house and attended to all the notes and dictation regarding correspondence at the Mincing Lane office, Mervyn, at half-past five, left the City by river steamer for Chelsea, and soon after six went quietly—but two steps at a time—up the staircase of old Wilfer's house in Cheyne Walk, and knocked a little breathless at his bedroom door. The door was opened by Hetty. Squeezing her hand as he passed by, Mervyn next greeted his future mother-in-law, Bella Harmon; and then her father.

The old man had his head turned to look out of his bedroom window at the horizon of the river, the factories, trees of Battersea, and dim, vague buildings beyond it to the south. He scarcely noted the incoming of the young man, but went on prattling to himself in a low voice interspersed with chuckles. His thoughts, mainly gay and tender, ranged over twenty years of time back to the 'sixties. Occasionally he pulled himself together and turned his head towards where his daughter sat: "I'm wandering a bit, my dear, in my recollections. All that was a long time ago. Here we are in the middle of the 'eighties; but just now it seemed to me we were back in 'sixty-five, when your poor dear mother was about, and you'd just moved into Wigmore Street. And we were still in Holloway, though everything seemed gay enough. Lavvy was going to get married. . . . Why, I saw Lavvy yesterday. . . . Was it? And all her children are growing up. . . . And here's Mervyn, who wasn't even thought of in those days. . . . Mervyn, boy, I've grown so fond of you, I can't somehow believe you weren't one of us in those days! Ah, those were *good* times, though they hadn't begun the riverside embankment. 'Member our Greenwich dinners, dear one? How we kept the knowledge of 'em from your poor Ma? She died in this bed, didn't she, matter of—oh, there! I've lost my powers of calculating——"

"It was in 1878, November, 1878, Pa." said Bella, gently, in reply.

"'Seventy-eight? Was it? How my memory's going! The autumn, after all that to-do between Dizzy and Russia, and the Indian troops going to Malta, and the Berlin Conference. To be sure. But here she is, here's your Ma, Bella, so *that's* alright——" And he greeted with his eyes some familiar figure who seemed to stand at the foot of his bed. And in the greeting his face looked so happy, his faith seemed so implicit, that his daughter had not the heart to utter the usual correction of the sane.

"Is she, Pa? I'm *so* glad." (To Hetty and Mervyn.) "Now, you two dear things——"

"Mrs. Harmon!" ejaculated Mervyn. "I'm sure your father won't mind my letting it out now, he's always been so kind about me. Mrs. Harmon—your—your husband has consented to my marrying Hetty—if—if you consent too. I don't mean at once"—(seeing a look of alarm coming into Bella's face)—"I mean after about two years, when I've done something to qualify for partnership."

Hetty's eyes shine and colour comes into her cheeks, and she says softly, "Oh *Mervyn!*——"

"And I thought—if—if you didn't mind. . . . Somehow I don't think you will refuse . . . your father might like to know. . . . That was *why* I hurried here, as soon as I could get away from the office. . . . And if you haven't seen Mr. Harmon at lunch time—or if he was too busy to tell you—there's another . . . piece . . . of news you and Hetty. . . . Yes! and Mr. Wilfer, too . . . might like to hear . . . I'm—I mean I've passed for a B.A. at Cambridge. . . . So my time there is over—will be shortly—and I can go abroad and travel for the firm——"

And Mervyn stops, because he fears dreadfully he is going to show a shake in his voice. The pathos grips

him. Here—so obviously—is this poor old man going to quit life, this consciousness of life; he is so evidently at the end of *his* career . . . how can this future of the new generation interest him? The ghastly cruelty of Death among those that love!

But Wilfer turns his face toward the three; his daughter seated by the bed, his grand-daughter and her betrothed standing, their arms already interlaced.

"Going to be married?" he exclaims. "Now, that's *just* what I wanted! I wanted to live to hear that. Now I shan't mind dying." And he turned to nod to the figure he seemed to descry at the end of his bed, and gave it a friendly smile.

Bella gave a hand to her daughter and to Mervyn as intimation of her acceptance of the long-foreseen, but she found no words, for she was crying impulsively, heart-breakingly. Her father was so obviously dying, so near the borderland of non-existence or change of existence; she realised she was no longer twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two, a young bride entering on the real experience of life; but a wife and mother, of forty-five, mother not only of three dear girls, but of two discontented boys—very, very dear to her, but somehow not getting on like Mervyn, not at all interested in their father's plans and projects. Old Wilfer, *her* father, fell into a kind of blissful silence and gazed away towards the river, unheeding the company in his room. . . . Mervyn and Hetty instinctively withdrew, and talked very quietly in the little library below . . . which the day-nurse vacated.

"I—I've never properly proposed to you, darling. I thought I—oughtn't to till I had spoken either to your father or your mother. I did speak to him to-day after I got the telegram from Judson. And he consented. Only he doesn't want the marriage to come off till I'm made a partner . . . and he thinks I ought to work for another two years before that comes to

pass. Every one seems to blame me for being young. I suppose it's jealousy because they're old! *He* reminded me the other day that I shouldn't be twenty-three till August five."

"Well, darling, p'raps they're right. At any rate, it looks very much as though poor grandfather—I *do* wish mother would say 'father' and not 'Pa.' . . . But I s'pose the dear thing is really incurable. . . . Difference between her 'age' and 'ours'—well, it looks very much as though the poor old thing was very ill, going to die soon. We couldn't in decency marry whilst we were in mourning—at least I *suppose* not. . . . But, you know, you've known for two years at least that I'd made up my mind to marry *you.* Don't let's have any silly doubts about *that.* . . . You know you're not looking a *bit* smart this afternoon—evening, I s'pose it is now. Go back to your rooms—where are you staying now?"

"I've actually gone back to Villiers Street. I realised if I was going to leave Cambridge I should be a beastly nuisance in Wigmore Street, especially now Reggie wants a room there, and you're all of you up in town—so I went round to 19. The Fairbairns are giving it up in a year or two, when the lease expires, but are fortunately still in possession. And by good luck the back suite of rooms that Miriam Clements used to occupy was vacant, so I've secured it for three months, at any rate. . . . I dare say your father'll let me come down from time to time to Chacely this summer when I'm not abroad. Of course, I fully realise that for the next two years I must devote myself—heartier than ever—to the firm's business, and I shall have to do a lot of travelling. . . . Better I should; otherwise I should be fretting to get married." Here he kissed her with a sudden impulse—not the chaste kiss of betrothal they had exchanged in the old man's bedroom, but the passionate kiss of an eager

young lover. Hetty returned it with self-abandonment.

Then each heaving a happy sigh parted, and Mervyn turned his steps once more to the steamer pier to return down the river to Villiers Street and a thousand small, happy things that wanted doing. Amongst others he must let Miriam know—about the B.A. and the definite betrothal—and Jeanne Dudeffrand—and mother and father—and Madame de Lamelle and Georgy, and lots of other jolly good chaps and dear kind women.

Old Mr. Wilfer died in the middle of that June of some undiagnosed weakness, or fading out, as yet only vaguely defined by doctors as "sheer old age"—though he was only seventy-seven. So far as his babble on his deathbed was concerned he almost seemed, before breath departed, to have gained the other side and to be uttering broken sentences from a happy reunion there. There only remained out of his family three members on this side: Bella, Lavinia, and Susie. Lavinia, of course, had done much of the nursing, and was probably with him when he breathed at slower intervals, and at last breathed no more as his eyes seemed to be looking into the eyes of some invisible person. So Bella had only to tell Susie by letter; and with greater leisure and circumspection to write to the other children in far-away lands, so far as she possessed knowledge of their addresses. Susie did not even answer her letter. She was at that time convulsing audiences at the Haymarket in one of her landlady parts.

"I've seen this American man, Corness," said Mr. Harmon, as Mervyn was going up to dress for dinner at Chacely Priory—the funeral of Mr. Wilfer was to take place the next day in Chacely churchyard. "I've had him to breakfast at No. One, and I gave him din-

ner at the House of Commons just before poor old Wilfer died. And, further, had him at the office whilst you were at Cambridge. He is really something out of the common. He's given me the fullest particulars and references. Of course we must look everything up in a business-like way; indeed, I have even thought, when you are free from entanglements, of sending you over to the States, in a quiet way, to study his people and connections and find out all you can about his business and his aims. I've some recollection of his father's firm showing at the old Paris Exhibition . . . 'sixty-seven. He seems—or at least his father seems—to have lots of capital, several great people on the other side who believe in him and his researches. Americans are beginning to take medicine very seriously, and, as you know, *our* researches and discoveries and adventures generally have attracted far more attention on the other side of the Atlantic than they have here. Tell you more about it after dinner; in fact, you and I had better have an hour's confab before we go to bed. . . . Sorry, old man, Reggie showed such bad manners at tea-time. I thought you behaved admirably. His mother's quite upset, especially because her father's going to be buried here to-morrow."

"Don't you bother about *that,* Mr. Harmon. It'd take a *lot* to offend me, under *your* roof. Reggie's upset about something, though what, I can't quite understand, except it is that I'm engaged to his sister. But I shall keep out of his way as much as I can till the funeral's over, and then I must go back to London to the office. After that I want, next week-end—if you'll let me—to clear up some more small matters at Cambridge; and *then* I'm ready to do anything you like—America, France, London. But I'll admit I'm restless, a bit off my chump with happiness, I expect. I wish I could get through these two years quickly—unless you'd let me get married before they're up?"

"No. I don't want you to get married till I can make you a partner, and I don't want to do that till you're twenty-five, and have done something noteworthy for the business. You promise well—extremely well—but I must be able to quote performances. You know enough about our business to realise that it borders on the gigantic, the world-shaking, but that, as compared with other things equally momentous, it is lacking in capital. I have put a hundred and fifty thousand pounds into it, and have paid away no small sums out of my regular income in addition—in times past—to get over the firm's difficulties and to smooth its path. . . . The mischief about the whole thing is that drugs do not appeal to either of our two boys as a career. I don't see the fun of giving either of the boys a salary, merely so that they should play a sulky or ineffective part in the concern. . . . Even then, I shouldn't get hold of Reggie. As you know, Mrs. Boffin died last year and left ten thousand pounds to Reggie—and five thousand, by the bye, to Hetty, her godchild—that'll help *you* a bit, by and by. Well, she left these legacies on the condition that they were to be vested in trustees till the legatees came of age—twenty-one. Hetty got hers in the spring, when she had her birthday; Reggie's is not handed over to him for a year yet; he only draws the interest on it. I sincerely hope when he *does* get it he won't waste it in foolish ways. . . . One way and another, with the income from this legacy and what I allow him—five hundred a year, till my death, when he gets twenty thousand pounds—he has a thousand clear. At present he gets very little pay as a young Guards' officer, but before long that'll mount up to—say—about two hundred and fifty. . . . A young man in his position, a bachelor, ought to find himself pretty comfortable on an income of twelve hundred and fifty, and of nearly two thousand, after I'm gone. I tell him if he wanted a small

fortune he should have taken my advice, *not* become a Guardsman, but come into our house, or taken up commerce in some other form. . . . We must go up and dress. . . . Sorry dear old Wilfer chose the height of the summer to die in. . . . Sorry, indeed, that he's dead. . . . He got a nasty jar over Susan's return . . . and her chewing those strophanthus seeds. Strophanthus—we had better be going up—strophanthus is opening up. We're finding it in all parts of tropical Africa now. See that collection that came in the other day from Sierra Leone? This is your room, as usual. John's next door. Think he was glad to get away from Harrow for the funeral."

A few days after Mr. Wilfer's funeral Mervyn met young Madison Corness at the office in Mincing Lane. Harmon introduced them, and left it to Mervyn to do a painstaking show-round over the whole establishment which was as vast as Mincing Lane conditions allowed. For numerous reasons John Harmon did not wish to move the City office of his firm from its old-established site and the long-time associations of Mincing Lane, but Mincing Lane conditions, City objections to more than one additional floor above and two tiers of cellars below, attempts from this and that direction to squeeze John Harmon—as a man whose wealth rumour much exaggerated—into paying extravagantly for increased accommodation were beginning to make him think the firm's real office might have to be somewhere in the outer ring of London, and the Mincing Lane establishment be kept for show and advertisement and the reception of distinguished inquirers.

Something of these ponderings were explained to Corness, who nodded and returned a non-committal reply. He admitted to being three-quarters severely practical, and the remaining quarter romantic, poetical

—much in the direction of Dickens. Dickens had written of Mincing Lane. That, in his eyes, was such an honour that Harmon, Veneering and Co. must at all costs maintain the Mincing Lane office if they wanted to capture American sympathies and dollars. Almost in the same flow of talk he asked that he might be taken out presently and shown Fledgeby's presumed offices in "Simmery Axe" (a pronunciation of which he was very proud—"Gotten it right, first time!") and other Dickens' sites in the City.

In the first interview Mervyn felt he liked Madison Corness. In the second and third he added cautiously, and then emphatically, "very much." Madison—he had come into the world when Biblical names were going out of fashion in the towns of the Eastern States, and surnames of distinction like Madison were coming into vogue as first names—Madison, at first acquaintance, was rather taciturn and apparently working hard in silent appraisement of you. Some sixth sense on the part of his interlocutor revealed that . . . if the interlocutor was a sensitive person. He was sizing you up with all his might, though he looked little more than boy, and was, indeed, only a year older than Mervyn. If he decided against you, he said nothing—ever—but his intercourse rapidly declined; if he liked you very much he showed it rather in the hand-shake grip, the glint of the grey eyes, the readiness to be at hand for help or conference. Before all things, he was an appreciator of the value of Time, a rare quality then, even in America.

He it was who decided that Mervyn should come to the United States in the autumn of that year and see his father and grandfather, and search for the information John Harmon wanted. On the joint recommendation of father and son—representing as they did one of the largest of North American drug firms—half a million dollars, a hundred thousand pounds, might

be found to enlarge the business of John Harmon's firm; and Madison Corness—youth notwithstanding—would enter the business in London as a partner. There would be—in course of time—affiliated offices of the American firm (Corness and Crabtree) in New York, Washington, Chicago, San Francisco.

"Who's Crabtree?" inquired Mervyn in these preliminary, intoxicating conversations when the world and its opportunities seemed so large if you looked at them from a shapely boat on a Severn backwater and from the point of view of an Anglo-American understanding—quite a novel thing to do in 1885.

"Crabtree? My Ma's father, my grand-dad, of course. Rich as Satan; he could put five hundred thousand dollars into this without blinkin'. Folks say he made his money in some unclean way; like as not, but Ma's a peach, and he'd back anything she recommended. Ma lost her religion when she was young, and now she's mad on good works, the only consolation, she says, if you haven't faith. As to my Pop—father, I s'pose you say on this side now? 'Spect we shall go back to that. Well, as to my father, he's—he's—just a Middle Ages magician, and the Greatest Chemist in America. But he's gone in more for mineral drugs up to now. Made much of his money at the time of our war. But we've tremendous competition on our side. Sixty millions of people, may be; but half a million drug firms, seems to me. My old man was over here last fall, while I was finishing up at Harvard, and got wandering about France. He's the greatest chemist that ever lived, I reckon, but he can't speak French. . . . It's only my generation that's beginning to learn modern languages. . . . Yet somehow he came to find out what your Dad's bin doin' in the Pyrenees. He met, somewhere in that direction, an Englishwoman with a French name who does a sort of looking after one of your plantations. My father—I *will* say the

word—my *father* was much struck with her shrewdness and ability, and that was how he came to hear about Mr. Harmon, and what he was doing. So I said I'd make the Grand Tour and look up Mr. Harmon with the necessary letters of introduction, just to show him, of course, he wasn't having his time wasted. Mervyn, old man, we'll set out to cure the world, and get rich and feel good in the process. Shake!"

So Mervyn made his first voyage across the Atlantic with Madison Corness in the late summer of 1885. New York, then, "said" little or nothing to him; it scarcely seemed noteworthy; its highest building was no higher than Grace Church. Its line along the Hudson was undistinguished, much the same as that of any nineteenth-century capital town, in any part of the world where they spoke English. Wall Street might have been part of Manchester; the docks reminded him of a visit he had once paid to Liverpool. Grace Church, then almost the only show building, was not superior to any of the modern Gothic churches of English provincial towns. The Central Park was homely, excessively homely at the end of a hot, dry summer. The main road running west of it became, two or three miles from the heart of New York, quite rough and countryfied. Bronx was an untidy, scattered village of wooden houses in half-despoiled woods; where, instead of hailing the ups and downs as you do nowadays for really picturesque scenery, you cursed them for the inconvenience and the jolting that they caused, for you had to drive out there in a buggy.

But it is highly unlikely he ever saw Bronx; as I fancy the Zoological Gardens, now their glory, did not exist then. Mervyn and Madison spent a day or two in New York, just recovering in September from its frightful summer heat. They stayed at the very respectable, very comfortable, but gaudily furnished

house of the Corness family in Eighth Avenue overlooking the north end of Central Park. Here they were well looked after by the caretakers, a negro butler and his wife, and hence they sallied out to inspect the great drug store of Corness and Crabtree, in Washington Square.

They passed in review the supplies and kinds of drugs belonging to Maddy's father's firm, Maddy himself being exceedingly abrupt and critical, Mervyn expressing decided opinions in a politer way which obtained for him the friendship of the patient little German manager.

Somehow, as Mervyn felt such young-man friendship for the rather cool, cocksure, candid American, the name Madison scarcely lasted between them longer than a fortnight; it became Mad or Maddy; and as this was one of the few points on which the son of Dr. Corness was touchy, Mervyn—with the intimation that his friend might call *him* "Mer" or "Vyn," and any dam' thing he pleased—reverted to the surname. "Your country's *great*, immeasurably great," he said on the fourth day of their stay; "but somehow it's failed in the matter of names. It has far too little variety. If I was your Chancellor of the Exchequer, or whatever you call him, I'd tax just a few names to prevent their endless repetition. It should cost a hundred thousand dollars to give any one or anything the name of Washington, and the few other abused surnames should be taxed in proportion." But Maddy only replied drily, "Say so?" so Mervyn dropped the subject, and henceforth called him "Corness"—"the same as our English name Cornish, I suspect, two hundred years ago . . . and, by the bye, old chap, if you're sensitive about your first name—who *was* Madison, if it comes to that? The first one, I mean?"—(he was given a history of the name and ceased to jest about it)—"Sorry. But I'm quite at your mercy. Dis-

graceful! No American history taught us in England. *My* surname is an ugly corruption of Van Eering—this, by the bye, I saw over a New York shop; it's a Dutch name, and may be as old as yours in New York history. It came originally from Holland or Belgium."

But they really only pretended to quarrel, out of light-heartedness. Mervyn, to tell the truth, had been a little disenchanted with New York, which in those morally distant days was utterly unlike what it became in the opening years of the twentieth century. The highest point in its buildings was probably the spire of Grace Church, not even as elevated as the cross of St. Paul's. The city, then, had no special distinction or character, though the food—he noted—was "scrumptious," far superior to the fare of London. But as they left in the train for the Catskill Mountains, where the summer residence of Madison's parents was situated, the scenery through which the train passed revived his interest and his spirits. The line crossed the Hudson at Poughkeepsie, and made its way to the incongruously-named station of Phoenicia. Here, at a clean little inn, they slept the night, because—in those days—a drive to and through the Catskills was best undertaken in daylight.

At nine the next morning there appeared a smart buggy with a negro coachman from the Corness house in the mountains. The coachman, with grins of delight and flowery speeches at seeing his young master back, delivered his mother's letter, welcoming the English guest. Phoenicia—in those days—was too new, too monotonous in the style of its plank houses, too startlingly out of touch with the Stone Age scenery to attract an Englishman's eye, other than politely; though the township contained some very good stores with food supplies, ready-made clothes, hardware, and furniture.

But then ensued a round-about ten miles' drive south-west, along the slopes of the mountains, through forests of pines and firs, oaks and chestnuts, maples and beeches. Young Corness was stoical, though his eyes glistened with home affection. Mervyn was rapturous: "Good as the Pyrenees," he exclaimed, more than once. So it was in foreground effect, if you did not climb beyond the forests and look for snow and ice which were not there. But the mountain sides had a glory of colouring exceeding anything of the kind in European autumn landscapes. The herbage, the shrubs, and deciduous trees blazed with yellow, amber, orange, scarlet, crimson, purple, and golden green, while the firs and pines and yews contrasted with their blue-green, black-green, brown-green and full-green masses, their cool grey, pink-grey, red-, purple-, and brown-grey stems and branches. There were lavender Michaelmas daisies, a lingering spray here and there of golden rod, pink flowers that seemed to be rose campions. Mervyn, the botanist, vied in enthusiasm with Mervyn the colour-lover.

He was almost sorry—but not for long—when the buggy drove up to the door of the Corness's summer home, three thousand feet above sea-level, with twelve hundred feet of Slide Mountain towering above them to the north-west. The look of enthusiasm in his brown-grey eyes melted the heart of Madison's stern-faced mother, Mrs. Corness. Not that she really was stern; a kinder, more generous soul did not exist in North America. But she had lost all religious faith as a young girl, and gained, in return, nothing which quite took its place. The glory of this world was so keenly appreciated, she loved children and husband so profoundly that she was not content with a probable life of seventy years: she hungered constantly for some indication that all did not end with the death of the body.

Meantime, in her earthly phase, she looked a little prim; wore *pince-nez,* had no colour in her thin cheeks, though perfectly healthy. She was dressed in advance of the fashions, ten years in advance, by instinct and force of character. Her skirt was smooth and plain without the enlargement of a crinolette; she added nothing "postiche" to the stock of hair that Nature had left on her head at the age of forty-five; consequently, her head seemed a little lean and rather old, though her eyes—if only the *pince-nez* were off—were so candid, they looked quite young.

In receiving Mervyn she repressed a motherly desire to kiss him, just shook hands with a sigh, and a smile belying the sigh, and conducted him through the hall and a further room, out on to the verandah from which you seemed to see a large proportion of the State of New York. Here, awaiting the return of the only son were his father, Dr. M. J. Corness, and Madison's sisters, Frederica and Melpomene. Their greeting to Mervyn was so completely friendly that acquaintance started at once. Mervyn's glances at the face and hands of Dr. Corness showed him (who was an initiate in physiognomy) that here was a scientific expert of immense intelligence who could also be, at the same time, quite human and humorous.

Madison quickly joined them; they cut the family joy at his re-appearance as short as possible, not to embarrass their guest, or to keep the two boys longer than need be from the noon-tide luncheon.

So to luncheon they went, in the large, low-pitched, timber-lined dining-room behind the verandah, and there we will leave them eating the delicious things you were given even in those days in the civilised parts of North America, while I explain a little more about the Corness family.

Dr. Corness, or Professor Corness, as he was sometimes called, was of English-American stock, related

to the Madisons, Jays, Hamiltons, and Pinckneys. His father had been a religious crank, though he entered on adult life with a comfortable fortune. He was alternately swayed by a fierce belief in the immediate second coming of Christ, which made preparations for old age and family up-bringing scarcely necessary; and a genius for invention, but not such as might bring in a substantial fortune—just handy methods of making napkin rings; suspending towels, and obstructing their passionate longing to fall on the floor; adjusting mosquito nets; or disguising in boots the affliction of a club foot. He had a family of seven children; and when these were educated, and each had its portion of inheritance allotted after the father's death, his eldest son, the professor I am describing (Professor of Chemistry at Columbia University), only inherited a sum of thirty thousand dollars—a trivial total, then, of six thousand pounds. The Lectureship to which he had attained at Columbia University brought him in what we should estimate at six hundred pounds a year. So, for an American of his age, passionately eager to explore and investigate, he was a poor man.

But he had a handsome face and strong physique; he was kind in nature and drily witty, and Eudoxia Crabtree fell in love with him at a summer school (or something of the kind) at Chattanooga, in the Blue Mountains of Pennsylvania. This was in 1859, and they were married in January, 1860, with her father's full approval.

Crabtree was tired of Eudoxia's anti-slavery Aunt, and wanted his Philadelphia house free henceforth to himself and his chosen friends.

Young Corness had been saddled by his father with the disenchanted names of Melchizedek Joshua. Melchizedek, it is true, was quite an old family name which had come over from the Puritan England of the early seventeenth century with the Cornesses, and

had been shared in use by their kinsfolk of Jays, Pinckneys, and Hamiltons. But Joshua was further inflicted in some obscure adumbration of the Second Coming.

Mrs. Corness, who had discarded Genesis definitely when she was eighteen, compounded with this crux in her husband's names by calling him Emjay. She sighed over the problem, one of her life's lesser unhappinesses, but Emjay was such a perfect husband and so entirely in sympathy with her lack of religious convictions that each sigh ended in a little smile. The great happiness of their early married life, when Emjay was founding his drug house with his father-in-law's capital, was interrupted by the terrible Civil War. Crabtree was just outside the age limit, for which he was inwardly thankful, as his allegiance was quite divided between North and South—both sections being his very good customers for his sanitary appliances—and he had very little sympathy with the negro because that race—he contended—was constitutionally *in*sanitary.

But Dr. Corness was very strongly on the side of the North, so he felt it to be his duty to join up as a surgeon or in some medical capacity. He was slightly wounded, in 1863, in Virginia, and put then into some Reserve, which was employed looking after Southern prisoners. So his married life was not seriously interrupted, or his new work in the analysis of drug materials.

Madison had been born in 1861, before the war; and the daughters followed in 1864 and 1866. A fourth child, born in 1865, died in infancy; almost the only real sorrow—so far—in Mrs. Corness's life, and attributed by her to a foolish passing interest in homœopathy.

Old Crabtree—his full name was Solomon Campion Crabtree, and he was known when in full vigour of

civic life as Sol. Crabtree—had a wonderful turn for mechanics, and was earning money when he was only seventeen. He had a passion for overruling water, and was one of the pioneers—in America—of modern sanitation. If I told you in simple language, even now, in what department of the house he specialised in grappling with this problem, very few Britishers and no Americans would read farther in this story, so extremely silly are we in our prudery. But there you were, in the United States, in the 'sixties, 'seventies, and 'eighties: you could not avoid typhoid and other unpleasantnesses in your home—except you lived in a log hut in the backwoods—without calling to your assistance the appliances manufactured by Crabtree at Philadelphia, New York, Worcester, and Raleigh, and applying them to the water-system then being introduced into great American cities. The Campion-Crabtree inventions, they were generally called.

Still, Mrs. Corness thought it right, thought it delicate to avoid dwelling overmuch in mind or speech on the sources of her father's—and, by delegation, her own—wealth. Still less, after she was married and out in the world and in the full swing of Society chatter, did she like any allusion, even in jest, to her father's relations with certain ladies, widows chiefly, who had shared much of his life through the three decades which had followed her mother's death.

As he grew older, Campion Crabtree—though he chuckled terribly, dressed extravagantly, wore an eyeglass instead of spectacles, out of devilment, and declared himself to be much wickeder in his ways than he really was—resolved as an unacknowledged atonement for the impropriety of his fortune's origin to put the mass of his money into a drug manufactory, with his son-in-law to manage it. He was enormously rich, even for 1880. He lived, entertaining his widow friends at Philadelphia in spring and early summer;

in the pine woods of the Adirondacks during June and August; at an hotel in New York for October; and for the rest of the year at an old Spanish city on the coast of Florida: when he was not on his steam yacht visiting the Bahamas and Jamaica. He actually came to New York soon after Mervyn arrived in the Catskills. So Mervyn was taken back there and introduced; and with this cynical, dried-up, elderly man again pursued his investigations of the resources and methods in vogue at the Washington Square drug store.

Old Crabtree—he was then (1885) seventy-one, but he had looked old after he was forty, and did not look much older when he was eighty—took a great fancy to Mervyn, advised him to cancel his English engagements and marry Frederica; and after that, enter his firm. Rather pettishly, after seeing Hetty's photograph, he forbore to press this proposition, but approved of the other plan he had already considered, of Madison's going to England and joining Harmon, Veneering and Co. in partnership. He would put a hundred thousand pounds into the English firm.

"We want community and interchange of interests. We'll keep the two firms distinct, one for the New World and the other for the Old; yet we'll combine our policy. When we can join the continents at Bering's Straits, as we may be able to do some day, we'll think of fusing the two companies. But, meantime, we'll try to cure mankind of all its ills by sound medicines."

Old Crabtree had come with his usual rapidity of decision to this conclusion regarding his grandson's career, and the making of an investment of a hundred thousand pounds in Harmon, Veneering and Co., to buy him a partnership. A hundred thousand pounds—half a million dollars—could scarcely be altogether lost in the English drug firm of Mincing Lane, with Madi-

son there to look after it. . . . And if it were, well, it was only the fifteenth part of his private capital, less perhaps, even, than that. But it couldn't be lost unless Madison played the fool completely.

So Mervyn returned from the United States in November, 1885, immensely impressed with what he had seen and learnt. Madison, particular only as to the full pronunciation of his forename, joined the firm of Harmon, Veneering and Co. as a partner, in April, 1886, bringing a contribution of a hundred thousand pounds with him, and the further intention of exploiting the territories of the Old World, and especially of the British Empire, for vegetable drugs which should cure all maladies of mind and body.

Harmon had that funny prejudice against minerals. When pressed he admitted it might have arisen from the work the Germans had done in mineral drugs and the stubborn determination they had shown in no way to initiate him into their researches; also that mineral chemistry had never interested him, only the chemistry of living things. In any case, the vegetable world held such unexplored or unexhausted treasure in remedies and stimulants, disinfectants, soporifics, detergents, dyes, carminatives, and cathartics. Why bother about the more dangerous and incalculable acids and alkalis derived from minerals and metals?

Picture Mervyn, therefore—for I must move on with long strides—working strenuously in London from his Villiers Street rooms, fragrant with memories of Miriam's former presence there, from November, 1885, to May, 1886. Miriam, after all, sometimes took tea with him and Hetty and played chaperon; or they adjourned to her theatre to get a glimpse of rehearsals and discuss new ventures. He sometimes looked back on this as the jolliest time in his life.

When Madison had returned to London to take up

his partnership and his abode there, Mervyn bestirred himself to find attractive rooms with, what his friend wanted, an "old world" flavour; though this quality in those days was still too much associated with defective drainage. However, they discovered rooms just vacated in a house off Adelphi Terrace, overlooking the river, third floor, and above the sordidness and dust of a newspaper office; whence the dweller could look down on a river, mysterious, tragic, beautiful, historical, on plane trees and lilacs, the new Embankment, and the obstructed, unfinished approach to Miriam's new theatre. This site would be conveniently near to his own rooms in Villiers Street: and these he hoped would last out the remainder of his bachelorhood, and not be swept away in improvements till after his marriage. In October, 1886, Mervyn took Madison to the Gave d'Aspe to undertake a thorough study of the gardens there, and to make the acquaintance of Mons. Faidherbe and the Scottish horticulturist. This was no longer Mr. Snaith, who had been sent on to Nipal, but one who, in his turn, was at first as raw, as un-French-speaking, and yet as shrewd and determined as Snaith had always been . . . young Ramsbotham. From this succession of Scots, Mons. Faidherbe, the genial Marseillais, had learnt the strangest English you ever heard, and English lady visitors at the gardens either blushed at some of his expressions or looked determinedly at the distant view of the plains while he was talking.

Delicious intervals in the steady and sometimes heavy work in Mincing Lane were the stays of a week, a fortnight at Chacely with Hetty and Elizabeth to help him in his work, his note-taking in the conservatories and plantations. Elizabeth had actually learnt shorthand, or so at least she said, though no one but herself could decipher her script. However, she took down with tolerable accuracy many of his notes, and Hetty

was becoming a very good photographer by the new methods. Helen was still too young and frolicsome to be included in the working parties, but was good at all games. She was an especial favourite with Madison, and called him Maddy and Maddikins unrebuked, being regarded as a child.

Mervyn, in this time of waiting and preparations, sometimes spent a week-end or the best part of a week at Cambridge, with Mr. Babington, or with some laggard student sharing his tastes in biology; or he even visited Stitchcomb at Oxford, to find out what Oxford was doing in botany and chemistry. He spent the Easter of 1887 with his darling Jeanne, and the preceding and the following Christmases with his father and mother at the Villa les Acacias. Here he avoided discussions as much as possible with the pietistic Lancelot, who now, as an additional irritant, would only talk in French. Lance had become vaguely jealous of his handsome and much too popular brother, and was arranging to become a French subject, having arrived at the conclusion that England and English-speaking countries had become part of a hostile Protestantism. His mother was now a dear old Early Victorian, and, with a vague jealousy of the country where Mervyn was doing so well, had become rather prouder of Lancelot, the model pupil of a Catholic College, than of Mervyn, who seemed to be what the English journals and reviews were calling an "agnostic."

Father—thought the rather disconcerted Mervyn (home was no longer home since Jeanne had left it)—poor father seemed played out—very silent—paid great attention to his meals.

CHAPTER XII

MERVYN'S MARRIAGE

IN 1886 Reggie Harmon had come of age, and the ten thousand pounds left him by the Boffins was duly handed over by the trustees, John Harmon and Mortimer Lightwood. With the interest on this, with his father's annual allowance, and his regimental pay—a mere nothing—he had an income of between eleven and twelve hundred pounds.

"I will also allot you definitely a bedroom and sitting-room at Wigmore Street as your London head-quarters; and, of course, Chacely is always your home," said his father. "But, my dear lad, I don't want any more sulks and frowns. I shall begin to think we ought to consult a doctor. I'm not going to argue any further about the allowance. My decision in that respect is final; and, as I have told you several times already, until my death you will get no more. When I die you will receive, like John, twenty thousand pounds. Prudently invested, that ought to bring you in a thousand a year; so that if you've really progressed in the army service you ought, one way and another, to be drawing two thousand a year after I'm gone. It's rather late to change careers, now, but if you choose to chuck the Guards and go to a University, or, at any rate, cram up botany—or chemistry—or horticulture—finance—glass-making—advertising—you might enter our firm as a partner and thereby get a rather larger income than if you remained

where you are. With your good looks—if *only* you wouldn't be always frowning. Hang it all! Why sulk perpetually at twenty-one?"

"Well! you'd sulk too if you saw your father infatuated with a bounder that was no relation, and yet inhabited your house and got engaged to your sister, and—and——"

His anger choked him and blocked his argument.

"*My* father," replied Harmon, "your grandfather, would have surprised you, Reggie. I wish you could have had a taste of him. Then you might appreciate *me* . . . think a little more kindly of me . . . reflect before you use phrases that wound me. That's all. But why make this bad blood? Why trouble your mother's life with these perpetual sulks and outbursts? Here! I'll tell you what! Choose some shrewd Q.C. and submit your case to his judgment. Put all the facts before him—honestly—and ask him what he thinks of me. Or, if you like, we'll agree upon some common arbiter. . . . Lightwood? Lady Feenix? If she could be bothered. . . . Lightwood's very shrewd and knows the world. Submit your case to Lightwood and hear his opinion. I don't say I'm going to change my decision on any advice, but if Lightwood can show me I'm acting unjustly towards you I'd look further into the matter. And as to Veneering—Mervyn—though I've got a remarkably sweet temper, I must ask you to use better, more restrained language when you speak of him in my hearing. I don't know what the new word 'bounder' is supposed to mean, but from the way you utter it it seems something offensive. All I have to say in reply is that I thoroughly appreciate Veneering's patience and good temper, his ability and his powers of work, and *I am very glad* that he is going to marry your sister and become, in course of time, my partner. He will only be taking up his father's work and his father's dormant place in the firm, which

is still 'Harmon, Veneering and Co.'; and as neither you nor John seem willing to come into it——"

"Veneering's a pretty rotten name, any way."

"So, no doubt, in some hearings is Harmon. Mervyn's father made a fool of himself in some ways, no doubt, but he re-started the firm on such new and bold lines as made it worth my while—financially—taking it up. It has now grown into a great, a world-wide business, and it is only just to replace a Veneering in its partnership."

"It's become disgustingly Americanised, if that's what you mean. There's this chap Corness on us now."

"Really, Reggie! I think yours is almost a case for a doctor! You must be suffering from some bodily cause, some displacement in gymnastics—errors in diet—overwork?"

Reggie got up and left the room noisily. He had come to see his father at the City office, as the latter rose too early in the mornings for home intercourse with a Guards' officer (in those days), and came home too late from Parliamentary work to talk about home affairs.

His father smiled at his manner of departure, then the smile faded, and he felt sad. But time was short and work pressed for consideration. He resumed reading a report from Kew on the bark of *Robinia pseudacacia.* This leguminous tree was likely to become so important in medicine that he was having it cultivated in the Pyrenees, as the Veneerings' acres at Calais were limited; though it was Mrs. Veneering and Jeanne who had helped him hitherto with his material for analysis.

Presently Mervyn came in with a number of letters to be signed.

"Mervyn, old boy! I'm a little down-hearted this morning. *Aglaë crassifolia,* from which we'd hoped

so much to make a febrifuge, turns out, on analysis, to be a fraud—I suppose it was some other plant that got mixed up with it? And Reggie's been in here, as he got up too late to catch me at breakfast. . . . I hope he had no 'words' with you this morning? Kept his temper?"

"I never even saw him. I'm sorry he doesn't approve of me. But I can't very well give up marrying his sister or working for you on that account."

"Of course not! Don't suppose such ideas ever entered my head. But, all the same, *both* my sons disappoint me. I did think one of them would have got interested in this business. *I* think it's thrilling. An ass came up to me the other day at the House and said, 'What? Not "Sir" John Harmon yet?' As though it could gratify me in the least being a knight or a baronet and having to plank down money in payment thereof to some mean go-between or Government fund or office."

"Well: but in compensation you've got three rattling good daughters. I'm almost in love with all three; they're all so keen on our pursuits and researches. Some day—p'raps in your daughters' life-time—women will rank—I mean politically—as high as men. And then you'll have five voters in the drug business instead of two."

"I dare say. Still, about those two boys. I've been asking myself whether I wasn't to blame in letting them go to public schools only famous for their name. If, instead, I'd sent them to some London school or college of more modern trend. . . . But I've no time to waste this morning in dismal reflections. *Robinia pseudacacia* promises great things. . . . If Reggie and John are disappointing, the three girls couldn't be better—the darlings! And now for some more dictation, and then I must be off."

I have related in another place how Bella and her husband had grown to know the Feenixes, who lived, when they were at home, on the east side of the Severn, at Deerhurst Park. Chacely Priory could be almost descried from Deerhurst, and the steeple of Deerhurst's pre-Norman church was visible from the terrace at Chacely; but a journey from one place to the other by any land conveyance was much more lengthy, and the nearest bridge crossing the broad Severn was situated near Tewkesbury.

Lord Feenix, in 1887 and afterwards, was Secretary of State for the Colonies. John and Bella had dined with him and Lady Feenix one evening in the September of that year. A month later, Bella, in her anxiety and perplexity, took the sudden decision of driving alone over to Deerhurst to see if Lady Feenix was at home and might be consulted with. Although Reggie used his room at the Wimpole Street house, it generally was when his parents were not there. He had very seldom been at Chacely in 1887, and when he came there, spent most of his time with the Feenixes.

His mother, fortunately, found the celebrated Suzanne at home and comparatively alone when she called soon after lunch on this sunny October afternoon. There were providential conditions which seldom occurred conjointly. It was a Thursday: one tiresome batch of visitors had just departed; Lord Feenix had run up to town; a succeeding batch of visitors was not arriving till the Friday afternoon. Suzanne Feenix, who was developing great intuition as she grew older and kinder, divined that the rather timid Bella had nerved herself for some unusual purpose, so gave her an early tea with her children, then packed these young persons off to games by themselves, and proposed to Bella a stroll to Deerhurst Church.

In the churchyard—and wherever on the way it seemed quiet and restful and there was anything dry

to sit on—they sat down; and Bella unburdened herself of her anxieties and woes concerning Reggie.

"I know the boy better than you seem to think," said Suzanne. "He is a handsome lad, when he doesn't frown; and quite aware of his good looks. My dear, we can't *all* be chemists and botanists, though such may seem to be the noblest of God's creations. I really don't know what to say . . . it is certainly curious that neither of your boys cares for his father's business. If it was the case of an ordinary chemist's shop in a struggling suburb one might understand, though even there, those glorious bottles of red and gold, green and blue—I've even—in Camberwell—seen violet ones—You know I've been dreadfully associated with Camberwell—and Clapham—just as you must have been with Holloway—I'm not in the least ashamed. . . . Well, I was going to say, even in the dreariest suburb there is a glorious colour and there is a romantic magic about a chemist's shop—subtle sugar plums, wistful scents, strange and indelible dyes. But, to be a chemist like your husband, like his firm: why, it is the nearest approach nowadays to being the wife—or the son—of a Magician in the Arabian Nights. They *did* marry, didn't they?—I'm going one day, next time I'm in France, to see your Pyrenees gardens. I'm told they're *wonderful*. Lord Wiltshire was speaking of them the other day, and said the French Government was getting a little bit jealous and restless.

"By the bye, I hope your girls are coming to our Harvest Home? It's absurdly late this year, for some reason connected with our vicar. He's been on a holiday. . . . And that other good-looking person in your *entourage*—whose name is in your firm—*Veneering,* of course. . . . *He* might come over, too, if he hasn't gone abroad. . . . But about Reggie. I take a sentimental interest in him because he thinks me beautiful and doesn't realise . . . fully . . . that I'm too

old for flirtation. . . . Thirty-four! . . . What are you, by the bye?"

"Oh, Lady Feenix! Don't ask! Terrible! Forty-six!"

"Nonsense! You don't look it, nearly. But what *does* the tale of our years matter? It is the things we eat and drink, the troubles our relations cause us, the investments we make that age us. Now we must be turning back, because my husband will be returning from London. The evenings are getting so short. *What* a lovely sunset! *Do* look: though it somehow makes one feel very Wagnerian and sad. You and I against it might be in one of Fred Walker's pictures and the gazer would think we'd married bigamously and just found it out. . . . Don't you think we live here in the very nicest part of England? You had better tell Reggie to come over and see me one day. Let him come on the pretext of shooting pheasants, and then, after tea, we can have a confidential talk. . . . Shall we go direct to your carriage? I expect the man is back on the box after his tea. . . . You've got everything with you? And, to add to the mystery and in case we run into Feenix, you could drop your veil, and I wouldn't tell him for a week it was you."

Reggie, within eight days of this call, stayed a day or two with the Feenixes, and shot pheasants so creditably that Lord Feenix, when his wife opened up the subject, was—for him—unusually agreeable. Reggie, he decided, should be seconded for service in South Africa. . . . Join the Governor-General's staff there as an A.D.C. John thanked Bella for what she had done and praised warmly her diplomatic skill, so that she cried: cried with pleasure at his praise, cried with a little pain at the thought of not seeing her eldest boy for a year or two. . . . But perhaps out there he would see some nice girl, get engaged, and leave off frowning or inventing grievances.

Her son, John, had passed his "little go" at Oxford in the Easter Term, 1887. He had rooms at "Maudlen"—as it is still preferred to pronounce Magdalen—College, and enough to live on comfortably with his father's annual allowance of £500 and a legacy of £200 a year bequeathed to him by Mrs. Boffin. Mrs. Boffin's mind had begun to fail a little. . . . Elizabeth and Helen bitterly remarked—after John was born, and she had completely overlooked the claims of their father's younger children. If Reggie was fiercely selfish, John was pleasantly so. He had no objection to Mervyn. If Mer liked to be so damned energetic and waste his energies on the commercial side of drugs, why, let him then be suitably rewarded. All that John asked for was clean and well-aired bedding, a sufficiency of good food, a well-equipped inkstand and writing-table, quill pens, and not too much noise outside. He would—Oxford finished, if ever Oxford was finished, but Maudlen just suited him—he would have liked to spend the rest of a long existence in a moated grange served by sixteenth-century servants, and visited by seventeenth-century guests, and with nothing of later date to distract his thoughts.

He avoided rough games—yet he had been rather a dab at them at Harrow, to avoid persecution and develop his body. He rewarded his mother's full affection by a whimsical liking, found his father a little primitive, mid-nineteenth-century, and a trifle noisy. Oxford, directly he saw it—of course, not including its railway suburbs, which were deplorable—was perfect, and Maudlen the most perfect part of Oxford. He would probably pass most of his life at Oxford, he thought in 1887. And he guessed right. He would live in a dream and was content to leave the nightmare—London—and all other places to brother, father, friends who wanted to handle more money than was necessary to *his* simple enjoyments.

"Lord!" would exclaim John Harmon the elder to his wife, after hearing a few such remarks, "However came we to procreate such a lad? Our girls are much more like us, pretty as *you* are, eager as I am. Our eldest boy's a surly grenadier; the younger is an aged philosopher at twenty!"

Reggie, resolving to himself that he could not stand the sight of the family rejoicing over his sister's marriage to a fellow who—he considered—had ousted him from his birthright (which apparently in his opinion was the right to spend all his father's money), had made haste to take up the *aide-de-camp*-ship which Lord Feenix had obtained for him in South Africa, and was preparing to hurry out there before the Christmas of 1887. Several days before starting he had found it hard to keep from heartbreak, even from tears; but temper was stronger than affection. He believed, or affected to believe, that he was only aiming at a year's absence in South Africa—"bit of a shoot" at game still not extinct, sight of an Empire now in the making. The Governor of that region might want to go up and meet Lobengula, and take him too.

His father encouraged this decision (which increased his irritation). John Harmon thought every young fellow, before he took up his life-work at home, ought to see something of the world, and Reggie tried to keep his upper lip from trembling. He felt he had never loved his mother so dearly as the day before his departure—December 18; so he kissed her passionately on the evening of the day before; cried, even, only she pretended not to see it; was on the very brink of cancelling the whole adventure and trying to "stick it," in regard to the wedding; and put up with the advent of Mervyn as a new brother: only a surplusage of pride got the upper hand. That night he pretexted the need for an earlier train to London, ordered the gig and the groom for eight, scuffled through a farewell

with her in her bedroom, with a bursting heart and a promise to see his father in London—and so went, saying good-bye to no one else.

Bella, as she dressed, felt this was not a sufficient leave-taking with an eldest son, who was going a voyage of—what was it? Seven thousand miles? So she dressed, took a hurried breakfast and caught the next train to London three hours after Reggie's. They did meet at Wigmore Street, to her infinite relief. Her husband was there. He laughed away her fears; said "good-byes" were beastly, upset every one; that Reggie had shown great sense in avoiding them, except from his mother and father; that Reggie was quite right, in full youth, to go on this stimulating adventure. Had his father not done the same? Reggie must be sure to go and see the vineyards round Constantia where his father had worked. He had made up for him a number of notes as to other places. Above all, he was to remember *this:* that if he disliked South Africa and chose to come back, in a month, in six months, they would be delighted to *have* him back, and to see him taking up home work instead. The voyage —at his age—was the main thing. . . . And hang it all! On inquiry he had found that Reggie's steamer finally departed from English shores at Plymouth. Why shouldn't he and mother run down with Redge to Plymouth and see him off from there? Thence, by a jolly cross-country journey they could regain Tewkesbury and begin their Christmas holidays there while Redge was revelling in the scenery and flowers of Madeira. "And lay this to heart, Reggie, boy: if after a week, a month, a year—I hardly expect you'll stay more than a year—you think better of this scheme and come back, we shall be delighted. I think, myself, your career lies at home, but before you settle to it, there's nothing like seeing a bit of the world."

So Reggie Harmon left England on December 20,

1887, with less of a heart-break than he might have done, had he been the son of a less wise, less kind-hearted father; who had known such pangs of heart himself when he had been young that he was resolved to save his children from them. And Bella, though sad in mind for months afterwards, perhaps in a way for always afterwards, still looked on her eldest's departure into the great ways of Life with more resignation because of the pleasant seeing-off. After all, her boy was a soldier, and if he had been setting out for war instead of a post in a Governor's train, they might have needed to feel sorrowful indeed. Whereas——

Mrs. Harmon, at the bottom of her heart, one of the few things she would never tell John, felt a little stung by the popularity of Mervyn. All her friends and acquaintances took with great calmness—scarcely an inquiry, no wish whatever to say good-bye—the departure of Reggie for the Cape of Good Hope, and an indeterminate stay there; whereas the approaching marriage of Mervyn excited the greatest interest, though he had only been within the acquaintance of most people for the last seven, six, five years. Directly it was made known that he was to marry her eldest daughter on or about New Year's Day, eighteen eighty-eight, all sorts of people had announced their desire or their intention of being present. Where was the marriage to take place? In London? In the country? At Chacely? "Yes, at Chacely," she had to reply, and in most cases to add: "Would you like to be there? Would you care to stay with us?"

Lady Feenix, who had been so unforgettably kind about Reggie, was equally kind—perhaps a little more so—about Mervyn. Lord Feenix, out of regard for John Harmon, whom he dimly perceived to be a man with ideas, not on any account to be snubbed, and nearly as rich as he was, had been really decent about

Reggie; but he was equally and unusually nice over Mervyn's marriage. Reggie had wanted very little at Lord Feenix's hands—Suzanne, indeed, had done most of the writing, and a clerk at the Colonial Office the remainder. But Mervyn wanted absolutely nothing and was damned pleasant about it. He spoke French to perfection, and both Feenix and his lady did nearly the same; he was good-looking and travelled, could tell very amusing stories, rode well, shot fairly, though he did not care about it, was a great favourite with the women and with Lord Feenix's children, had done not so badly at a conventional university, an old and known university, not any of these nineteenth-century things that inspired no respect. . . . His father, in the 'sixties, had been rather a rip, people said—retired ministers and gouty ambassadors—who had heard of him abroad. But, hang it all, he had paid up in the end, and as to the name: that they said was a Flemish one, misspelt since the eighteenth century.

The girl's father, after all, was the M.P. for Feenix's town, Tewkesbury. A Liberal, worse luck! but more or less an Imperialist, and with £300,000 to his name, they said. Feenix decided to be as nearly sunny over the business as was possible with his nature. He acquiesced in Suzanne's idea of asking Mervyn to stay at Deerhurst prior to his marriage, and she extended her cordial hospitality to such other of the Harmons' guests as could not comfortably be put up at Chacely.

So, a day or two before Christmas, there arrived Madame de Lamelle and Georgy Podsnap from the Pyrenees; Miriam Clements from the Embankment Theatre—who had foreseen this emergency and arranged her theatrical plans to give herself and company ten days' holiday this particular Christmastide; Jeanne and Gaston Dudeffrand, whom Suzanne insisted on carrying off—their French would be so good for the children, and Jeanne was quite one of the handsomest

women she had ever seen, and Gaston's indescribable charm made her head reel; and the Thiselton Dyers from Kew—yes, she would have them too, they might arouse some interest in botany in her callous children, besides, Feenix wanted to see them seriously about a Government measure affecting Kew; and Babington and Judson from Cambridge: Suzanne would have them as well, dear, placid things. Feenix and she were going in strongly for science now, and their arrival would be providential, because she had a great many questions to ask about our colonies and how they might be developed.

Madison Corness was at once convoked to Chacely. All this apportionment went on at the Tewkesbury railway station between the Harmons and Lady Feenix, to the great amusement of the porters and the station-master, and the slight annoyance of such poor passenger creatures halted there and not connected with either party or its friends.

Aunt Izzy; the rather bewildered and silenced Lavvy and George Sampson; Mrs. Veneering—actually *Mrs. Veneering!*—quite a stranger to England, and feeling in her shyness more Early Victorian than ever; and Mortimer Lightwood were naturally marked down—as John Harmon said—as the prey of Chacely, and were quickly bundled into hired or owned vehicles and sent off Chacelywards.

In addition to the other two hosts, there had arrived at the station the genial Frank Milvey, Vicar of Chacely, who was in due course to perform the marriage ceremony, and had turned up to proffer hospitality to two guests, at least, for whom at Deerhurst or at the Priory there might be no room. I dare say the Milveys gave delightful hospitality to one or two or three of the wedding guests, but I have no special note on the subject. [The Vicar of Chacely, needless to say, had been, since 1875, the Revd. Frank Milvey, now Canon

Milvey, of Worcester Cathedral. When John Harmon had acquired the patronage of Chacely Church, he had sought out this over-worked philanthropist and persuaded him and his wife to retire to the calm beauty, and rustic, Saxon heathenry of Chacely. He was subsequently made one of the Canons of Worcester, rode a tricycle from the early 'eighties; and from the sheer happiness of his life, when his children were out in the world, and his indefatigable wife had once more grown plump and rosy, had regained his health, lost his cough, and become intensely interested in the pre-Norman architecture of Chacely Church and the edible fungi of Gloucestershire. Consequently, he had had all his religious views broadened and sweetened.]

Mme. de Lamelle, disliking crowds and clusters, and Georgy Podsnap, who disliked or liked everything pretty much as her friend did, had arrived the day before Christmas Eve, and were already installed at Chacely. Miriam Clements also had forestalled the larger party; and another early arrival was Mrs. Eugene Wrayburn.

Lizzie Wrayburn, as John Harmon still called her, was a great friend of Bella's and was godmother to Bella's daughter, Elizabeth, at this time a girl of eighteen. Her husband, Eugene, whose life she had once saved from the brutal attack of a love-sick man, madly in love with Lizzie herself, had, by the death of brothers and father, become a squire over many acres in Hampshire. But in later middle age he had reverted to invalidism and seldom left his Hampshire home. Nor did his wife often pass from his side. But the marriage of the Harmons' eldest daughter seemed to be an occasion when she must leave husband and children to look after themselves for a few days and place herself by the side of her friend when her eldest daughter was going to be married. Elizabeth Wrayburn still remained, after twenty-four years of married life,

singularly handsome; but circumstances had given her mind a strongly religious turn, quite out of keeping with the thoughts, interests, and speculations of the generation growing up at the end of the nineteenth century; at any rate, it was not in harmony with the meditations and mental trend of Elizabeth Harmon, who generally said "Oh, *bother!*" when told that her godmother was coming, or had written expressing a wish that Elizabeth should visit her in Hampshire.

"She knows nothing about geology, mother," Elizabeth would say, "and her botany does not carry her beyond pressing picturesque ferns and English wild flowers. She looked quite shocked the other day, when I told her at Kew how very limited our native flora had been since the last of the Glacial Ages. She said she had never heard of the Glacial Ages before; there was nothing about them in the Old Testament."

However, the occasion of Hetty's marriage was so noteworthy and Bella was so anxious every one should be happy over it, that Elizabeth unearthed from a drawer of curiosities a large, expensively bound volume of Church Services, with a gilt lock and key and maps of Palestine in all ages, and lists of the fauna and flora of Palestine, and took it to church with her on Christmas Day.

Besides these guests of the first class, there were the scarcely less important, excited, affectionate, and well-provided guests of the serving and cooking departments. The first housemaid's brother was allowed to come and stay in one of the gardeners' cottages to assist in the waiting and because he was engaged to the second housemaid, or the between-maid. Two porters from Mincing Lane and one of the clerks professed to have rendered special service to Mr. Mervyn, and were surreptitiously asked down by Mrs. Harmon to help wait or cook or something. And at the head of the household, inspiring respect in the very cook

herself—otherwise despotic mistress over kitchen, scullery, and servants' hall—were Mr. Slopey, the great hall porter of Mincing Lane and his frail little wife Fanny, once known in the 'sixties as "the Dolls' Dressmaker."

Slopey had married Fanny Cleaver in 1865. She was something of a cripple then, but, through Harmon's intercession, surgery of dawning cleverness had done much to remedy her lameness. She still used a stick and hobbled a little, like a witch of the Middle Ages, but more for the impressiveness this gait lent to her cryptic sentences. She had, in 1866 and '68, produced two healthy boys. One of them was second footman at Chacely (or in London) and the other a junior parcels' clerk in Mincing Lane. Fanny still had a cutting tongue and the servants trembled a little at her visits. But she did not come often to Chacely, and when she did she was treated with great distinction, especially as she was on the borderland between up- and down-stairs; would go in some morning for a private conference with Mrs. Harmon, and frequently sat with Mrs. Wrayburn in her bedroom or hobbled with her up and down the terrace walk.

Her abundant hair, still golden with scarcely a thread of grey, since her marriage had been "done up," which made her appear much more ordinary save for her sharp grey eyes. But she had grown plumper and a little taller than in pre-marriage days, owing to better food, more rest, and a great increase in happiness. Nowadays she never dressed dolls, save for making a present of great distinction or for the assistance of Mrs. Harmon at a bazaar; but the three Harmon girls had preserved dolls dressed for them in the 'seventies, and had shown them at the offices of *Truth* as the work of "Jenny Wren."

Mervyn came to the morning service on Christmas Day, to sit with Hetty and the other girls, and their

mother . . . and on this occasion their father (willing for once to give the Almighty the benefit of the doubt) and a few others of the house-party were likewise present, and stayed on after the service was over to shake hands with the vicar and vicaress, and with their eldest son, a lieutenant in the navy. Mervyn was to be absent from Suzanne's watch and ward till he returned to dinner. [The night drive from Chacely to Deerhurst, *viâ* Tewkesbury, was a lengthy adventure then in winter darkness. Every day, however, between Christmas and the wedding Mervyn came and went between the two places.]

The weather was much too mild for ice and skating . . . almost spring-like . . . but time hung on no one's hands. For the Cambridge professors—and even Lord Feenix—the greenhouses and nurseries at Chacely were worth a good deal of study and inspection. The less giddy of the other guests felt slightly interested in strange blooms, in untimely fruits, in bristly plants indicated as "poisonous," in strongly-smelling leaves, tear-provoking pollen, scented barks, and incredible seed-vessels. Others played wild croquet on lawns that were not too sodden or rough; or tennis; or a little football on the cricket ground; or were driven, in long mornings or early afternoons, to famous houses, towns like Tewkesbury, or points of view. Chacely Church was explained by Canon Milvey . . . "such a good sort," they all agreed; "it was quite a pleasure to spend the afternoon with him and Mrs. Milvey." Suzanne had them all over in turns and parties to Deerhurst Park; and pre-Norman Deerhurst Church was one of the sights of England. The weather being so mild, a steam-launch took the tougher and more adventurous up and down the lordly Severn. The exceptional weather seemed to have been commanded by John and Bella for the special gratification of their guests. "If only all English winters were like this! . . ." they

nearly all of them said, with monotonous good spirits. Someone found . . . or said he had found—ripe wild strawberries . . . a spray of crab blossom, or wild cherry bloom . . . a nest with four eggs in it . . . and would write to the *Times*. Why did people want to winter on the Riviera, if England, the west of England, was like this (which it only is once in ten years)?

So much for the occupation of the daylight between eight a.m. and four p.m. Between four-thirty and six, in all three houses of entertainment, there was afternoon tea, one of the most beneficent institutions which ever descended on England. . . . [In the 'seventies, they say; apart from the vague tea and cake of dowager marchionesses which grew into an institution a few years earlier.]

Then there was a lull between six and seven, in which the elderly stole a nap . . . perchance . . . over a book . . . and the young gossipped and whispered and flirted and tried on new dresses.

Then dinner—half-past seven, to leave time for the fun afterwards. Generally the party which was assembled for dinner either at Chacely or Deerhurst opted for games of all kinds afterwards. Even Lord Feenix subdued his chilly dignity to participate in musical chairs; and Hubert Parry from Highnam played the music. But twice in the nine days before New Year's Day the Feenixes brought over all their guests and most of their children to Chacely, to a colossal—almost picnic—dinner. It was an idea of Suzanne's . . . many small and less small round tables, all sorts of seats; volunteer carvers told off to help the servants under the guidance of Mr. Slopey and the Chacely butler. The carvers were allowed to resume their seats after the turkeys had been cut up and served.

And after dinner—not too soon after, so that you could revel in dessert and good wine and cigarettes and cigars—on two special occasions, Miriam had arranged

theatricals . . . oh! but serious. Mervyn played, so did Hetty and Elizabeth, and Lady Feenix, Madison Corness, John Harmon junior, and Aunt Izzy; Jeanne and Gaston Dudeffrand. Miriam insisted on being stage manageress, promptress, and costumière. The piece, written by John junior, or, at any rate, put together by him, was of a most fantastic nature, in four acts; and the first two were given on Friday and the two last on Tuesday. All the household and the gardeners, the churchwardens and local farmers were invited to join the audience. The Chacely household applauded uproariously, but the farmers and churchwardens were a little shocked and mystified.

The fact was that John junior was already rather cynical. Mrs. Wrayburn, on the plea of a slight headache, had quietly withdrawn from the last act because it depicted the marriage of a deceased wife's sister; but the rest of the audience—even the vicar—was so wrapped up in the search for the hidden meaning in this strange issue, and yet so much inclined to laugh even when the play promised to be most serious, that her withdrawal was scarcely observed.

At last, at the end of these nine days, the First of January, 1888, dawned about eight o'clock, and Hetty partook in her petticoats of a hurried breakfast. The wedding was to take place at noon, but brides in those days dressed for their weddings with really serious deliberation, and worries and anxieties about the wedding dress not fitting or the bridesmaids having colds dismissed from their minds all other thoughts.

Mervyn had left Deerhurst after a hurried, scarcely-eaten breakfast at 8 a.m., and had looked so boyishly distraught that Suzanne, before sending him off in the brougham—because of his wedding attire—had kissed him, and so had her eldest daughter. He first proceeded to Chacely Priory, to satisfy himself on all points, but was not allowed to see his bride because

she was on the verge of hysteria through the bodice catching her up under the arms. He satisfied John Harmon, however, that he had got the ring, and then was driven round to the Vicarage, because of his patent leather boots; and harboured there till the moment came for self-secretion in the church vestry.

However, under January sunshine and a pale blue sky, a premature and false suggestion of spring in the hedges, the ceremony went off all right. Mervyn found the ring at the critical moment in his left-hand trouser pocket. His best man, Madison Corness, showed a real capacity for business and an unexpected boldness in delegated kissing—all sorts of people, from aged women to bouncing girls.

Hetty forgot that the sumptuous satin pinched her underneath the arms. Bella cried a little, more in remembrance of the absent Reggie and of the pious fraud she had perpetrated in purchasing a splendid sealskin coat and presenting it in his name. Aunt Izzy cried at the thought that she had never been a bride. Miriam whisked away a tear or two and carefully dabbed the moistened cheek at the remembrance of her own disappointment and the thought that she was now nearly forty, though young for a principal lady. Jeanne and Gaston pressed each other's hands, in remembrance of their own marriage ceremony. Mrs. Wrayburn prayed that Eugene might recover completely from his eczema. Suzanne wished that *her* John would look a little more genial: his stiffness was largely put on to repel intercourse with the unauthorised.

John Harmon senior noticed how grey the vicar was getting, and wondered if *he* showed similar signs of age. And most of the young people thought how differently they would arrange their own weddings and wedding costumes.

And Mr. Parry played the "Mendelssohn Wedding March" as it had never been played before on the

organ of John Harmon's presentation, which he had been asked to select; and as it might never be played again, for he himself subsequently disapproved of that composer, and no one was likely to come to Chacely with more conservative views who could master the organ as he did. And quite a number of people cried. They didn't know why, probably the unusual beauty of the music. And many laughed when it was all over; and the villagers and farm-folk and gardeners uproariously acclaimed and hurrayed; and confetti were thrown—real sugar plums—so that the village children nearly died with joy or stomachic disorder.

And the breakfast that followed beat all records before or since, at any rate within the two bordering counties. And Hetty and Mervyn, dressed as 1888 tourists (but quite becomingly; Hetty never having approved of the monstrous crinolette development), started in the afternoon for a London hotel, and next day for the Balearic Islands.

Mervyn, which was why he was bearable in good fortune, mixed most of his sentiment and full-heartedness with practicality. He had heard recently of the wonderful climate, the adaptability to all drug-producing flora of the Balearic Islands. Why not go there first, and wind up the wedding tour with a few days in the Pyrenees, on and about the Gave d'Aspe gardens, and a look-in at Mme. de Lamelle at Pau?

So, on January 2, 1888, they made their way in a dream of unreasoning happiness to Paris, before the bad weather came on in later January; then from Paris to Marseille (why give it an unnecessary *s*?)—to Marseille, which was strangely thrilling in its commerce with Africa and the East. Marseille to Barcelona—a delightful sea-journey—and Barcelona to Palma, the capital of Majorca . . . and a stay at Soller—roses and jonquils—rides up to the summit of El Puig

Mayor—with all the island spread beneath them, and the encircling Mediterranean. Explorations of its caverns and bone deposits—glimpses perhaps of its vanished fauna, showing what the Baleares were like when still united with Spain—their strange gazelles, with enormous lower incisors for root-grubbing. Investigations of the flora and its drug-yielding capabilities. A survey of its delightful people, whose Provençal language has remained unaltered since the times of the Troubadours, and has escaped the degradation of the kindred dialects in France.

CHAPTER XIII

HETTY VENEERING

La Pépinière,
Gave d'Aspe, près Lurbe,
Basses-Pyrénées.
February 20, 1888.

DEAREST LIZZIE,—

ELIZABETH is such a long name to write and say . . . "Beth" is so misleading. I know you dislike "Lizzie" nowadays! If you really wish me to go back to "Elizabeth" I will do so; but while I am on my honeymoon, let it be "Lizzie." Afterwards it shall be Elizabeth, or if I am ill or tired, "dearest E."

I am neither ill nor tired, but still enjoying myself enormously. Majorca was *too* delightful. Our month there was the happiest time I have ever known. Not that I ever had anything *but* happy times. Now that I am out in the world my past makes me almost afraid! I suppose unhappiness will come along in due course.

We returned from Majorca to Marseilles by steamer because we were not sure the new railway through the Pyrenees was open. Then from Marseilles we came on here *viâ* Toulouse where we stopped a night and a day to look about us, and Pau where we stayed a week with Mme. de Lamelle and Georgy Podsnap. They were so kind: it was almost like coming home. Georgy—she won't let me say "*Miss* Podsnap"—met us at the station with an elegant victoria and drove us out to their villa which is nearly two miles from the town, south of the railway and deliciously quiet. It was furnished

with what I thought very good taste but was, above all things, comfortable.

Madame de Lamelle is a dear. She does not talk as much as Georgy, but her eyes twinkle and she tells very good stories, especially about the almost forgotten days of the "sixties." She strikes you at first as rather hard, rather "cynical" some people would say. Georgy told me she was down on most people, and said nearly every one including herself, but excepting Mervyn, was a humbug! To me she seems awfully kind in a dry sort of way, and insisted so much on my resting in the afternoons that I got quite nervous about my health, though I really feel splendid.

Well, after a week with them we left our heavy luggage there and came on by rail and carriage to the great Pyrenees nurseries of our firm. We had *such* a welcome here—from the men—though I thought the French manager looked a little surprised, and apologised rather irritably at our rooms not being ready or tidy. I felt quite shy at the labourers' enthusiasm. They said—I fancy—such terribly outspoken things to Mervyn—in Basque or Limousin or something—about the children we were going to have.

Mervyn is as happy as I am, but is not quite pleased with the manager, M. Faidherbe. He said I was not to say anything about it till he got home, lest it worried father unduly. On the way home, by the bye, we are going to stay with the Dudeffrands near Calais, so that I can see Mer's father. It may be very cold there (here it is like spring); but Jeanne is such a dear and will be sure to keep us warm, and Mervyn, besides introducing me to his "Papa," wants to see Gaston rather specially.

I wrote mother a line when we first got to Pau. I hope she got it. Mer, as I said, is very happy, but is developing rather a wrinkled brow over M. Faidherbe's doings. I don't think F. quite expected our coming.

Mme. de Lamelle had not told him. He is outwardly very civil, but his eyes and lips don't smile together. Your loving sister—with love to all of you, including the servants,

HETTY.

La Pépinière,
Gave d'Aspe.
Feb. 25, 1888.

DEAR FATHER-IN-LAW,

Or shall I straightway accept your proposal to call you "father," *tout court?* Really, to treat myself as your son, I will. When I write to my other father I will continue to say "Dear Papa," since he still prefers French phrases in this respect.

Well, dear father, things here do not please me.

We arrived at Marseilles on February 8, spent a night and a day at Toulouse and a week with Mme. de Lamelle at Pau, and came on here seven days ago.

For various good reasons, Mme. de Lamelle had said nothing about our arrival till the morning we started for Oloron, so that we drove up almost with the postman. Of course this made things a little uncomfortable for that treasure, Hetty, but she sprang to the occasion and set to work ever so pleasantly arranging our sleeping quarters and a meal, while I tackled Faidherbe about the two last reports and the alleged failure of the *Diotis* crop and the *Cunninghamia* plants, and other perturbing announcements he made last autumn. Ramsbotham is rather an ass, and though he has been here—what is it?—two years?—can't speak French intelligibly or understand it except it is spoken to suit his grosser senses. But he is perfectly honest and is at daggers drawn with Faidherbe. Faidherbe, as you observed in your last letter, has been giving himself very generous holidays, simply, as R. suggests, so that he may visit plantations of his own or his brother's on the Marseillais coast, to which he conveys and trans-

plants our choicest products, including the *Cunninghamia splendens.* I am not returning home till all this is cleared up; I might almost say till F. has gone. I shall send this letter on to Oloron to be posted there, not liking all I hear from R. as to F.'s control over the outgoing mail, nor even of his relations with the postmistress at Lurbe.

If for any good reason you think I ought to be home and at work in Mincing Lane, either you or Madison ought to replace me here till we have got rid of Faidherbe. And *how* to get rid of him? *That* is the crux. Mme. de Lamelle thinks you only have to give him six months' notice or six months' pay; but she also thinks he has relations in the French parliament who might raise a fuss, and—knowing the French in their present hostile mood—considers that instead of investigating, proving and prosecuting it would pay better *à la longue* to say you or I or some unnamed person is going to be manager henceforth, and he can clear out now, straightaway and with six months' pay and a bonus of——? Two thousand francs?

The French Government don't like us because we are too English a firm. I might do for a temporary *remplaçant* of Faidherbe because I am thought to be partly Flemish and am known to have been educated in France, and my parents have almost become French. Now my ideas are: (1) To stay here and manage till you can make other arrangements, but in the long run I may be more useful to you in London. The time will come—ever so long hence, I hope—when you won't want to bother too much about office work in London, and perhaps when Madison may have become home-sick for America, and I shall have to be the boss in Mincing Lane. (2) Why should we not bring Jeanne and Gaston into the business, and make Gaston manager here? He doesn't know much about botany—as yet—but he is a damned good cultivator, very

sound in horticulture. And there would be Ramsbotham, or his like, for technical botanical work. The climate and scenery are gorgeous. Jeanne would be very happy here. From what mother said to me at Chacely—my own mother, I mean—and from what she has subsequently written, my father at Calais is very shaky. If he were to die, I expect mother would sell up the Calais estate and be only too glad to move to Pau or Oloron and have the Lamelle and Georgy for company. She could continue going to French Catholic churches under a French director of her conscience, and in other ways be at peace. My brother by that time will be a priest, or so far on the road to it as to be out of account.

Meantime, Hetkins and I will stay on here till you have considered matters and come to a decision. If you wish to act quickly, you could telegraph (in cypher) about F., leaving me full discretion to act and act quickly along the lines I have suggested.

Did I tell you we were well and happy? We ARE.

Your grateful son-in-the-spirit,

MERVYN.

Chateau Perceforêt,
près Marquise.
May 15, 1888.

DEAREST BOY,

I wrote or said once—did not I?—that after my marriage I should always address you in French. I don't know why I have broken the rule, except that the Harmons have been so kind that I have become quite reconciled to dear England, and even long, sometimes, a little to hear English spoken. And then I feel I am writing this letter to Hetty just as much as to you.

About Hetty, by the bye, I should like to speak as the mother of two large children. I am very much interested in what she told me in her last letter. I should

say it was decidedly as she thinks—and hopes. Que tout aille bien avec elle!—there!—you see I am relapsing into French. I always do when I feel tender. . . .

Things are now pretty well settled between Gaston and Mr. Harmon. Gaston hopes we may be able to leave this place in July, so that he can take over management from you during August. Hetty then, if she stayed so long, might be able to travel home with you in stages, tout doucement. And yet much of France is really too hot for railway travel after June and before mid-September. It might be better if she left in June. Perhaps Georgy Podsnap, or some one from home—how strange it is that I still think of England as "home"—could escort her to Paris and Dover and from Dover. Or you might do so to Paris and I could meet you there and take over charge.

I am so glad you thought of bringing my beloved Gaston into the firm. I am sure you have not made a mistake. After Africa he has never really cared for the Calais district, et ni lui ni moi nous ne trouvons fort sympathique le caractère de son père . . . M. le Maire a des idées si arriérées!

Father does not seem to me at all well. I believe he really misses that scoundrel Alfred Lammle. I am sure the latter was a scoundrel once, though he seems to have died decorously and in funds at Monte Carlo. Father says *he* is living out of his world and out of his time. Just think! He has never seen London since 1864! His "world" died in France when the Second Empire fell. I have ventured to tell him it was *diet,* diet entirely, *diet* first and foremost. He should take *no* sugar and *no* fat, very little wine, *no* liqueurs or brandy, and no pâté de foie gras. Me voilà presque médecin! Already in the business! Why don't you send father from London some of the drugs you are making? Those for fatty degeneration of the heart, I should

say. Gaston t'écrira dès que tout est fini, rangé, signé. En attendant, et toujours, quand même et quand même, even if you turned out utterly bad. . . .

Your loving sister,
JEANNE.

1, Wigmore Street,
Cavendish Square.
June 1, 1888.

DEAR MERVYN,

I have come to a definite agreement with Gaston. From July 1st (for convenience of accounts), he becomes manager at the Gave d'Aspe, where he will spend first a month or two under your superintendence as a partner. My hope is he will really take to it, grow *to* it and *with* it, and eventually become, not only our French partner and representative, but the figurehead in a daughter firm in France.

I very much doubt whether our great enterprise in medicine production can be united in one British house, in our house of Mincing Lane. I may have thought so twenty years ago. I didn't then take into account the growth, rather than the decrease, of international jealousy. Although we work in the friendliest co-operation with Corness and Crabtree, and Madison is the connecting link, we remain separate houses, though they (through Madison in a way) possess about a fifth of *our* share capital. We must look forward to similar turns in France. Our great Pyrenees plantations and their growing factories near Oloron may have to become an affiliated enterprise, even an independent company, owing to the jealousy of the French Government. Similarly we may, after all, some day take up your ideas as to Majorca, and produce a Spanish company, and there may be a Belgian one connected with the Congo domain (I am probably seeing Leopold II. at Ostende this summer). But the French company, through Gaston and your sister, may be really affiliated with ours.

You would make an admirable director-representative of the mother firm in Mincing Lane. Our founding money will receive good interest. If only your young brother had not become a priest! If only Madison had a brother or a male cousin! If only—most disappointing of all—*my boys* were not footlers, snobs, or pedants, our families and friends might really have controlled this vast system of drug production and have healed the world!

However, though it is good to have long views, it is equally good—necessary—to have an eye for details. For some time to come the plantations in the Pyrenees will be conducted with the money (and the conspicuous talent!) of Harmon, Veneering and Co. Gaston, however, thinks that if he prospers during the next twelve months, his father, who is becoming very rich over something or other (I hope honest), may put twenty, thirty thousand pounds (it sounds an awful lot in francs! Query? *Is* it good for the French, morally, to use 9½*d.* as their financial unit? It makes them seem so much richer than they are) into the French branch of our company; perhaps, indeed, get a small group, including a French Rothschild, to subscribe £100,000. And *then* make the French plantations into the daughter company, I project.

For a hundred reasons which I have not time to put on paper, and which you do not need to know, I believe in the French side of the Pyrenees for drug cultivation. The Spanish side has less rainfall, less fertile soil, and is absorbed in its unending, idiotic strife between Carlists and non-Carlists—and ferocious Republicans—all of them brigands under politer names. If we are to dabble with Spain in drug cultivation it must be in Majorca as you urge . . . a little later. I am growing old, elderly, at any rate—57 last birthday! Don't run me out of breath. Madison, by the bye, is a real trump for work—can't say how many hours a day.

When he wants a rest he comes down to Chacely and plays the fool with Helen and tries to be a cricketer. "Elizabeth," I suppose you thought I was going to write in reference to his love affairs; but Lizzie won't look at him, beyond mere politeness. She is growing very serious and takes an absorbing interest in botany, in the Chacely houses, in Kew, even in the not very flourishing Royal Botanic in London. She has thought, at times, of going into one or other of the women's colleges at Oxford or Cambridge; but she fears that time is wasted there over antique classic rot or an orgie in inapplicable algebra or Tennyson's poetry (which I think very good). She entirely endorses all your views on Education!

However, Helen—well, Helen (she won't let me call her Nelly)—Helen will be eighteen next birthday (I adopt her way of putting it, instead of "seventeen last April"). How they are all growing up! She thinks we ought to put more "artistry" into our work and have a "Cut flowers" department. So I said to her the other day: "Well, my dear, so be it. Upon your promising me you won't cut a bloom that Elizabeth says is wanted for seed or drug purposes, you may start this business. The head gardener will put you in touch with some Bristol or London firm that buys flowers and you shall be free for three years to work at this. I will supply you with a reasonable amount of capital, and you shall keep the profits—for three years. After that we'll see. She really may make a profit; there is growing yearly such a demand for table decoration, nosegays, buttonholes, and God knows what in connection with births, deaths, and marriages. And it will keep her mind off silly flirtations.

As to Parliament, I think I shall remain there so long as Tewkesbury retains me, though I am getting very sick of it. It costs me quite a thousand a year in indirect bribery and election expenses, and wastes a

frightful amount of time. But if I were out of it drugs and chemical research might get jumped on. Though I doubt this so long as Wiltshire is Prime Minister. The Wiltshire Cabinet has righted itself. I don't know when the Liberals will come in. Gladstone has lost my interest and backing, if that counted for anything. He cares absolutely nothing for science, and I care *less* than nothing for the Jewish scriptures and Homer. Wiltshire knows almost as much botany as I do, and is going to reorganise and complete on grand lines the "Flora of Tropical Africa." I have promised him all our assistance. Bella and I went to Chapelmead for a week-end in May.

Now I must leave off writing. By the bye, we are going to introduce this new invention, the type-writer, into our office. If I can master it I will have a private one for my home-work. Best wishes, dear boy, that everything will turn out well. Do urge Hetty to be very careful. I do not think she ought to *ride* any more, for a while.

Your other father,
JOHN HARMON.

Chacely Priory,
nr. Tewkesbury,
July 3.

DEAREST MERVYN,

John and I were aghast at your letter of three days ago. Even though your telegrams that followed were more reassuring. How *my own darling girl* could have been so *mad* as to continue riding, I can't think. Georgy Podsnap no doubt has got used to her own pony, but would be the last person, *I* should think, to help *any one else* with a restive horse. However, I must not be ungrateful, seeing that apparently she *was* able to help my own darling Hetty in her trouble. I am writing rather incoherently, I fear, not knowing

all the circumstances and being still in an agony of apprehension. Although I am rather stupid over foreign travel, I could come *at once* if you telegraphed there was any change for the worse—at once. And John would escort me. I only don't start because I understand there is next to no accommodation at your house. But I dare say Madame de Lamelle would put me up, or I could go to an hotel at your nearest town and drive backwards and forwards. I will do *just* what you think best. Only I beg and pray as soon as Hetty is well enough to travel that she comes *home,* even if you cannot get away till later.

Our news from Reggie is good. Father is trying (in Parliament) to agitate for a bridge over the Severn near Forthampton Court, just below the Avon junction. Our young County Councils are so timid about such things.

Your loving and very anxious Mother,

BELLA HARMON.

Gave d'Aspe.
July 16.

DEAREST OF MOTHERS,

I am not up, yet; at least not off my couch; but Mervyn is at last—he says—able to sleep and eat in a normal way. They have made far too much fuss about me. I am getting well very quickly. Mme. de Lamelle is here and is writing to you. Poor Georgy has been quite ill with anxiety and regret and deserves heaps of praise for her pluck and not the least blame. How it all came about and why I did not adopt your advice earlier I will tell you when we meet. The explanations involve so much anatomy, and the French doctors pronounce their Latin so differently to ours! I have got to look up quite a number of terms.

Poor Mer was away at Oloron when it happened. No one was to blame, except Fate and exceptional cir-

cumstances. I felt obliged to go to one of our plantations and could not walk there. I will tell you later all about it; too much writing tires me. As soon as I am strong again I will return.

Jeanne and Gaston arrived at Oloron just before it happened. Mervyn had gone to meet them. Mme. de Lamelle will see me as far as Paris (Georgy too); and you and father might meet me there. And darling Mer, if he has not finished, could come on later.

Ever your loving

HETTY.

Chacely Priory,
nr. Tewkesbury.
August 8.

DEAR AUNT IZZY,

I am so sorry you and your summer visit have had to be put off and put off; but you will have quite understood and have forgiven. I think of you all alone in the little house at Finchley, unless you have been away to Broadstairs? But I should think in a week or two you could come here and find me quite gay again, with my dear Hetty restored to health.

John and I only returned with her here from Paris last Tuesday. We stayed in London twenty-four hours to have her examined by a good accoucheur, but he was very reassuring. Of course, for several weeks, she is to keep very quiet. She is sure to fret about Mervyn, even if she does not say so. So we have begged him to come here, and come for a holiday, as soon as he has initiated his brother-in-law and sister into the affairs of our Pyrenees stations.

Our other "boy," Madison—curious, the two M.'s, as we call them!—has, to quote John, been a trump of trumps. I'm told Americans when they *are* good are like that, and when bad, *very* bad! Madison is becoming so very fond of Helen that we've had to take notice

of it. Of course she's only seventeen, or as she says "seventeen and a half." John and I could not consent to their marrying for at least another year. I should prefer not till she was nineteen. When Mervyn is back here at work, I tell Madison he ought to take a holiday to America. His mother keeps saying the same thing in her letters to me. And have a good look round him there before deciding to propose to Helen. But he says it is too late. He has lost his heart and Helen won't give it back. However, we shall see.

Strange, is it not, that he did not choose Elizabeth? A good many young men have admired her. Some have thought her *not* prettier—my too elder girls are too tall to be "pretty"—but *handsomer* than Hetty. I cannot see that she is. I mean, not better-looking. But Hetty—well Hetty is *just a darling* all through, as you know. Lizzie—I have promised not to call her that any more—Elizabeth is a little grave at times. A little "withdrawn." Helen, who is a dreadful tease, told her the other day that if she did not marry she would become a terrible old maid and ask for—what do they call it now?—the Suffrage?—I mean, a Vote.

But I ought to be grateful to Something (John seems very doubtful about there being a Providence!) for such children as I have had. Johnny—John junior as we sometimes call him, now he is growing too tall for "Johnny"—is getting on well at Oxford. Reggie writes in high spirits about his prospects. You heard all about his going to South Africa when you were here last Christmas (for Hetty's wedding—*dear, dear* Hetty). Well, now he is accompanying the Governor on a tour to Bechuanaland. But I must close as I am going for a drive with Hetty.

As regards Mudie's books, why don't you ask for William Black's last? Something about a House-boat.

Your loving niece,

BELLA HARMON.

1, Wigmore Street,
Cavendish Square, W.
November 2, 1888.

DEAREST JEANNE,

Here we are, settled down at last, and it is *such* a relief to me to be a "well" woman again and to be in a town, after this thoroughly *sloppy, rainy, muddy* summer. My father has definitely installed us here, at home, in the town house. John junior is so enamoured of Oxford that he only leaves it for Chacely: though there are rooms for him and father and mother and any one of the girls, if they want to stay in town. Father, to provide for this, gives me an "entertainment allowance," so that I need not feel anxious about joints and entrées and servants' wages. Mer has been working steadily at Mincing Lane whilst Madison went off to the States.

But Maddy—as I must and will call him, now that he is betrothed—though father declares he isn't and won't be till after next April—to Helen—Maddy is now back. I have not seen him yet as he went off to father at Chacely to detail the long conversations he had had with the American firm, especially a mysterious old griffin, Crabtree, who is his mother's father.

I am so glad you like the climate of the Gave d'Aspe. I thought it nearly perfect and I am very glad Gaston agrees with me. I feel perfectly well now—at last—and am very busy. Besides housekeeping which I try to do well because Mer has to entertain and dear father must be made thoroughly comfortable when he is up for Parliament or for business, I visit sometimes at Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital which is somewhere at the back here—rather a walk, in a rather daunting region called Marylebone. Or rather it is spelt that way and pronounced "Marrybone." For a long time I used to be afflicted about its grammar, thinking it came from a French name of Norman times. But

now I see it was really "St. Mary-le-Bourne"—St. Mary of the Brook; though that seems also a jumble of tongues. But I think if I got permission to do a little work at this hospital I might better come to understand what all young women ought to be taught at school. If we were properly instructed in such matters we should take far better care of ourselves. Si de nouveau j'ai l'espoir d'être mère, je te le ferai connaître et tu m'instruiras. But don't you agree with me, that we ought all of us to have learnt those things at school? Yet when I have once or twice touched on this subject with English doctors—or even French ones—they were horrified. If we knew all about childbearing we should—they thought—lose all our charm for our husbands. They would have liked to have added "lovers," but no respectable doctor would admit the existence of unlawful love in the hearing of a respectable young woman.

I am sick of all this humbug. We ought to know everything that can be taught us about our bodies, about how to live a good, profitable life, and how to avoid death.

However, this seems as though my letter were taking a morbid tone. I am much too happy for such to be the case. I do not say over much to my darling Mer about these thoughts, because I think it worries even him that I should seek to know *everything* about women; therefore he shrinks from discussing parturition as though it were not altogether "proper." Are French husbands like that?

Don't fail to write when you have time. A good deal of my thoughts are wrapped up in the Gave d'Aspe and the way things are going. Did the new seed of the *Cunninghamia* come up? And what has Gaston done about acquiring the west side of the valley between Bedous and Accous, or the next gorge to the east—I forget its name—above Rébenacq? It is said the rail-

way is to be carried up that valley (they were surveying up to Leruns) for eventual passage into Spain. But if I go on in this strain you will think I am intermeddling!

À tantôt, ma *bien* chère sœur.

HETTY.

Newlands Corner,
Cape Town.
Feb. 15, 1889.

DEAREST HETTY,

Your letters have been so kind that I cannot help replying to them, though in a general way I feel the only person I care for in the whole family is mother. She is the only one who writes regularly. Father's letters *will* go on supposing that I care about drugs and drug productions, and always revert to botany and botanical questions sooner or later, or give me news about the firm which does not interest me, seeing I derive no profits from it. I never cared for botany since I realised it was running away with most of our money to no good purpose. But I won't grouse. I've at any rate got enough to live on, to buy a sufficiency of clothes, even if I could not afford to marry unless the girl had *pots* of money.

Yet I'm not quite the fool they take me for *in some quarters*. I see immense chances here of making money. When I was little more than a kid I swanked about the Guards. And perhaps if I had not passed into the Guards I should not be an A.D.C. out here. And when the Great War comes, which is bound to come some day, the Guards will play a decisive part, you see if they don't. Only meantime I want to make pots of money, quickly, and then come back to England, choose some nice, good-looking girl, settle down on a fine place, and get into Parliament.

Only not with the intention of wasting my life on botany! Even mineralogy has more sense. *That's* what we ought to have taught at schools—geology and

mineralogy—How and where to look for precious metals and precious stones.

There's a man out here you'll soon see something about—C. J. Rhodes. He's member of the local Parliament for Kimberley or some such place up country, where they have found sacks and sacks of first-class diamonds, and nuggets and nuggets of gold. He's become boss over most of the gold and diamond companies, lives quite simply, but has loads of money—in with the Rothschilds and—I forget their names but some other big financial persons. He's *dead keen* on the far interior, beyond British Bechuanaland and the Limpopo—King Solomon's mines, don't you know, and all that. He believes he's squared the Boers. They all swear by him. And if he can get this charter, I'm going to be with him, you bet. I've had a talk with him here when he came to visit the Governor. And when he comes back from England—you'll see——

So instead of spending a year out here, as father first thought, I may put in three—or four—if I can make my pile. Then I'll return, marry, and settle down, and buy some place, and suck the Dad's jujubes if I catch cold. The first good diamond I find I'll give to mother. I may be a bit hard-hearted in your direction, but I'm *dead nuts* on mother. It's partly her letters about you that made me feel inclined to write all this to you. You know one does feel a bit soft, a bit home-sick out here. Send us a photograph of yourself—looking your prettiest—just something I can keep by me to look at. And drop me a line from time to time. If you address it "Government House, Cape Town" it will always find me.

I suppose John's wasting his time at Oxford? How are they standing the American at Chacely and Mincing Lane?

Your affectionate brother,
REGGIE.

1, Wigmore Street,
Cavendish Square, W.

DARLING MOTHER, *May 30, 1889.*

I saw Dr. Whitely this morning, and he thinks it pretty certain I am going to have a child. If so, the event should take place some time in November. He, of course, advises great care, especially in view of the accident last year. He advises me to keep lying down as much as possible, at any rate till after June. That very nice nurse whose acquaintance I made at Queen Charlotte's Hospital is coming to see me to-morrow, and from time to time. To-morrow Mer will be away, probably at Chacely, seeing to the new plants from the Gave, so I thought she and I could have tea together and she would have excellent advice to give me. Dr. W. is altogether against my going to Chacely for my confinement, which disappoints me terribly. He even advises no railway journey this year, except perhaps for Christmas (lovely to look forward to!) when I am up and well again and can bring IT with me to Chacely, *dear, dear* Chacely!

I am both glad and sorry over this turn in events. Sorry, only, because there are times when I tire of London, its noise, its smells, its heartlessness. Of course this is only peevishness—part of my condition. I am doing the business so thoroughly that I am inclined to feel a little sick in the mornings and a little disposed to cry when I ought *really* to feel very glad and confident, as you used to say *you* did when *I* was on the way! But it will be better, I think, to carry out the doctor's prescription, and as I can't come to you, perhaps you could indulge me by coming up to town and staying with me, and when you go back home, Lizzie might take your place? Lizzie is so wise now-a-days that she inspires me with immense confidence.

Your loving daughter,
HETTY.

1, Wimpole Street,
Cavendish Square.
September 25, 1889.

DEAR OLD REDGE,

I was much interested in your last letter. Every one here says that in a few days the issue of a Charter to Rhodes's Company will be made known; and although we are a little anxious lest you should be rash, we hope if you do become associated with Mr. Rhodes's enterprise you will make out of it a great career, perhaps rise some day to be a great Colonial administrator or else make your fortune quickly out of mining, pick up a few diamonds and nuggets, come home, marry happily, get into Parliament, and promote good legislation.

I am always a little unhappy that you don't believe enough in father's and Mervyn's enterprise—drugs, and above all vegetable drugs. I am like them: I don't trust minerals and metals. They are so near the poison side, even if they produce efficacious medicines.

You may reply asking me about these new discoveries in coal tar, in bye-products of coal, out of which the Germans are making such wonderful medicines. But if you do, I shall turn on you and ask: "What *is* Coal?" And you'll have to admit its vegetable origin —It is simply trunks of trees, infiltrated, I admit—regretfully—with mineralised water.

Since the end of July I have been *much* happier because the doctor and the accoucheur-surgeon whom Mer consulted thought I might now—from August onwards till the middle of November—be out and about a little, taking care not to tire myself, of course. So I have been having little walks and little careful drives in the brougham visiting, amongst other places, the Queen Charlotte Lying-in Hospital at the back, in West Marylebone. I want to get thoroughly educated in the great Baby question and also

to confer with one of the mid-wives there—*such* a nice woman. The poor women in the hospital simply adore her. I thought, perhaps, if she could get leave of absence to come and look after *me*, when my trouble comes on. . . .

Not that I am thinking about that too much or too often. I am really too busy, because although I now take a little exercise every day and don't come down to breakfast and sometimes go to bed—or to my bedroom—quite early (I *do* miss the theatre so!) I get through a lot of work for Mervyn and for father. I answer some of their letters about drugs so intelligently, signing them simply "H. Veneering"—that the answer, when it comes, is addressed "H. Veneering, Esq.!"

Mer, of course, is frightfully busy, so I am happy to be so well (considering), but he no longer looks or feels so anxious. The doctors, of course, won't hear of a train journey, or of any drive farther than the Zoo or the Botanic Gardens. I go occasionally to a matinée, but never anywhere in the evening. What used to be Mer's bedroom is turned into a dear little sitting-room. Here there is a good reading lamp—Marylebone's electricity seems to have come to utter grief. It *is* an unhappy borough. Mer has put in a small piano of delightful tone made, of course, in Germany by a firm with a Slavonic name! So when he is not away at Chacely or in France (where he goes for rapid visits—his father is ill, and his mother much worried) he sits with me here of an evening and does his work at the table under the lamp, and I play through endless music at the piano; or just lie on a couch and read. Or sometimes I am busy sewing and embroidering tiny garments whilst he reads aloud to me.

I have always been such an active out-of-doors woman, that you will be surprised to hear how intensely I enjoy this life.

Well now, dear boy, I must not write too long a let-

ter. We all hope you won't be rash in leaving the Governor's service, yet we all understand you want to shape a great career for yourself in South Africa, and then return and live near where we live. I am not going to open up controversial subjects now, not till after Baby is born, but I am sure of *this:* that you will some day come to know what a good fellow Mervyn is.

Ever your loving sister,

HETTY.

Cablegram from Mrs. Harmon, 1 Wimpole Street, Cavendish Square, November 24, 1889: to Captain Reginald Harmon, Government House, Cape Town.

"Hetty gave birth little girl doing well. MOTHER."

1, Wimpole Street,
Cavendish Square.
December 13, 1889.

DEAREST REGGIE,

It shocks me profoundly to have to write this letter, nearly three weeks after sending you that telegram about darling Hetty's baby girl. Your sister Hetty died four days ago and will be buried to-morrow at Chacely churchyard.

I have not cabled you again because I feared the effect on you might be too terrible. I thought it better to write. And yet you may see the news in the Press—I don't know what is best, and your dear father is so ill with grief, I don't like to trouble him with questions.

You will hardly be able to believe—like me—that any one so beautiful and loving as Hetty is dead, *could* be allowed to die. She began to be ill twelve hours after the little girl was born and soon she was very, very ill. We scarcely yet know with what. The doctors—we called in additionally Sir Michael Fosbrooke—were so

very reticent and secret. They wrote it down at last as "Septicæmia." Both your father and poor distraught Mervyn (who is nearly dead with grief) fear it was a form of puerperal fever, and think that she must have caught some germ of it from visiting a great lying-in hospital in Marylebone.

She was so tender over women's sufferings, so anxious to help them. I don't know what to think. We ought, perhaps, to have advised her to think *only* of herself and go *nowhere* whilst she was bearing children.

The head monthly nurse came from practice at this hospital, but she had been for a short interval of rest to the Isle of Wight. The whole thing is so wrapt in obscurity that one dares hardly inquire for fear of libel actions or of making unjust aspersions. And what is more, the doctors who are very puzzled won't admit it was puerperal fever, and we can't make out anything clear from the description in the death certificate.

I am so ill, so heart-broken, so utterly in despair, I cannot write any more. You will understand, won't you? The little baby is a darling—that is our only consolation. We are all afraid poor Mervyn is going out of his mind. His kind sister Jeanne has come over to look after him, and Elizabeth has been a *jewel* of goodness.

Your loving mother,
BELLA HARMON.

CHAPTER XIV

MERVYN'S JOURNEYS

1, Wigmore Street,
Cavendish Square.
May 12, 1890.

DEAR MERVYN,—

IT is scarcely necessary to say that Bella and I feel for you to the very depths of our hearts. But you ought, by our very love for you, to measure our dismay and anxiety at hearing practically nothing since you left home last Christmas for Trinidad, except cablegrams giving your addresses for letters, just testimony to the fact that you exist.

Your grief I doubt not seems immeasurable. But you are young, not yet twenty-eight; and the father of a healthy child. I know no more of the mystery of life and death than you do, but I cannot quite steel myself to the conviction that bodily death puts an end to personality. I can so little bear to convince myself that any one so wholly precious as Hetty perished when the body died, that I go on hoping for proof—some day—of spiritual survival, even ready to believe it without proof.

However, I won't turn this letter into a philosophical treatise. I have thought, bit by bit, over my dealings with you since you were a boy (how well I remember my seeing you first, when I called on your mother at the Calais villa!) And in truth I cannot justify you

in my thoughts for keeping us without news of yourself. I never discuss you with any one, not even with my dear wife—so heart-broken over her child's death, so agonised over asking herself and me whether we could not have done this or why we failed to do that, that she seems to have grown *old* since Hetty's death. Our business is so appropriate to your grief. What are we striving for, what have we put our money, our energy, our brain-strength into? The prevention of such deaths as Hetty's. The cure of all diseases.

Do try to pull yourself together. If this travel gives you no relief in heart-ache, come home. We are all longing to have you among us. Your child—I told you we had called her Hetty—Henrietta—is thriving. Nearly six months old, and promises to be a lovely little creature, almost Hetty come to life again, we like to think. Perhaps *that* is Resurrection?

Would you also think me brutal if I said that I was getting over-worked during your absence? If you are really curing your grief to some extent, I don't mind. But to leave me without any assurance of this is—well, it is not like the old Mervyn.

I am obliged to give you one piece of bad news in this letter, for fear you may learn of it in some more abrupt way. Your poor father died a week ago, at the Calais villa. Your mother is rather woe-begone, but the best of all Jeannes has left the Pyrenees to comfort her and see to everything. Gaston was only able to spare time just to attend the funeral. You know how particular French people are about funerals; otherwise I don't think he would have come away at all.

I have told your mother I would break the news to you, before she writes. . . . She cannot very well send you a "faire part," because you are a signatory!

As far as I can gather, your father died from a stroke, quite suddenly. Of course it is early to make plans for your mother, but I should think she would

sell the villa (for much more than they gave for it) and move to Oloron to be near Jeanne. Your brother Lancelot is with her just now, but presently returns to Autun. We are so busy at the present time that all I could do was to travel to Calais by the night train, attend the funeral, and return to London in the afternoon.

Needless to say, we all send love. We all love you very dearly, Mervyn. We shall all be nearer happiness again when you are visible to our eyes. Elizabeth, I should add, is like a mother to your babe. She has taken special charge of it at Chacely. Madison, I expect you remember, is going to marry Helen at the beginning of June. I shall put them at 1, Wigmore Street (I hope we shan't come to regard it as unlucky!) till you are back again amongst us, and then we may have to recast our plans. Reggie is apparently leaving his association with the Governor at the Cape (on the best of terms) to serve with Rhodes's Company and be a pioneer in Mashonaland.

Your loving—father, if you still so regard me—

JOHN HARMON.

Polson's Hotel,
Greytown,
Nicaragua,
June 30, 1890.

MY DEAR FATHER,

I deserve some of your reproaches, but not all. I arrived here yesterday and found your letters of March and May at the Post Office. I had travelled here from Panamá and Costa Rica. As a matter of fact, besides sending cablegrams about my address I *did* write two letters, one from the Orinoco and another from Cartagena (Colombia), and if they have not reached you it is not my fault. I am awfully sorry about my real father's death because in her old age I

think my mother had grown very fond of him. The sad truth, so far as I am concerned, is that he seemed to have died when I was a child. I have yet to learn why he so completely wilted. It was my mother who did everything for us.

* * * * *

For a month, at least, since I left England I felt nearly off my head with grief, and got so much pulled down with loss of appetite, etc., that I looked a middle-aged man. After landing at Caracas I came more to myself, and later I found that journeying in Venezuela and Colombia is so risky—people, food, night-accommodation, insects, snakes, vampire bats, and bugs—that it certainly induces some surcease of sorrow in the merely stupid desire to survive. You must add, in imagination, to the terrors already cited, frightful sun-heat, earthquakes, torrential rains, and travelling armies of ants; presidential crises, *coups-de-main* or *coups-d'état;* and deep suspicions on the part of the governing half-caste of the pure-blooded European, especially if he be travelling with a British passport.

My sense of loss over Hetty is still such that I can scarcely bear to write about it. And yet curiously enough, I am filled with a conviction she is not dead, that she is even with me here in some inexplicable way. I can't reason about it. I can only say that at Caracas, of all horribly inappropriate places, my stunning grief seemed to lift. She came back to me in dreams, dreams so real that in some slight way I was consoled. I began to look about me and to observe.

My visit to Trinidad was an utter failure as regards note-taking and discoveries. I was shown all sorts of things and believe I said they were very wonderful. I intended to write reports about them for the firm, but can't find any trace of my notes. On the voyage and for some weeks after it, I slept every night an almost drugged sleep—never dreamt, seemed partly stupefied.

People were very kind and did not pester me with questions.

Well now, I won't go on with that phase. It is an enormous joy and help to me *now* to know that her child lives and seems to be Hetty born over again. I almost hated the child at first for being, in some way, the cause of its mother's death. I am quite aware, quite remember that the real cause was puerperal fever —mysteriously enough; but knowing Hetty as an individual was more to me than any children, I lashed myself with reproaches that, after the warning we had at the Gave d'Aspe, I ever let her have another. But these after thoughts are no good. I'm sure you both did what you could and all you could——

Well now, my plans are to see all I can of the Nicaraguan flora—from a medical point of view—in a few months; then possibly to take a hurried look at Honduras and San Salvador, and after that come home. I shouldn't in any case go to Mexico because you will remember, in our correspondence with old Crabtree, we pledged ourselves not to anticipate them there. As to Central America, I think the general understanding was for both parties to be free, to intercommunicate results and share them or develop separately. When I have time I will write out my notes on Costa Rica, of which region I think very highly, *except for the earthquakes!*

Give my love *specially* to Elizabeth for taking Hetty's place beside her babe; to Helen and Madison. Buy some rattling good wedding present for *them* on my behalf and reclaim the cost from me. I will send you another letter—a long one—as soon as I have seen something of Nicaragua. I am writing to my mother at Calais, and I will write soon to my other and very dear mother at Chacely——

Your affectionate
MERVYN.

Chacely Priory,
nr. Tewkesbury.
August 20, 1890.

DEAREST MERVYN,

Your letter to father gave us all *such* relief. Whether discreetly or indiscreetly he read it aloud (if there was anything very private in it no doubt he suppressed it). There were present: Me, Baby, Mother, and of course the Reader—dear father, the one impeccable, sinless person I have ever known. Some of us cried a little, just enough to dab eyes a little afterwards, but Baby and I decided we were still young and you were still far off thirty and that we had a great deal of work to do in the world.

But just a few more words about our darling Hetty before I switch off on to some other subject. The masons are getting on fast with the tomb—horrid word, but I can't at the time think of another. It is designed like those exquisite ones of the early eighteenth century that we have all admired in Tewkesbury churchyard, like a large casket. I have made a little sketch and enclose it. Of course we all hope you and father are going to find some drug—at last—that will give a few nice, chosen people like him and mother, you and me, Helen and Maddy immortality. But in case you fail you must join Hetty here, so there will be room for you. Do you mind my being so explicit? I don't feel that this is a very delicate letter, but it is sincere.

And now about business. The firm, according to Madison, are getting on "fine." Stanley's having called attention to our drugs has resulted in huge orders from all directions, because Africa now is being opened up with vigour, and at the same time blackwater fever is slaying the white pioneers at a great rate, those at least that have not our remedies. Our business with India is increasing at such a rate that father thinks we shall have to found an Indian branch and one or more

Indian manufactories. We shall need to establish an Egyptian branch, he thinks, and if Kitchener is allowed to smash up the Mahdi—or is it the Khalifa?—we shall be called on for participation in the Sudan.

So as soon as you return you will be too busy to grieve much. You poor darling—how, *how* much I feel for you, knowing how intensely you loved her—and how deeply she loved you. But we won't think of her as dead. I'm sure she isn't. I did feel just at first, for about a month, a sort of blankness, but suddenly hope came to me. . . . I can't explain it but I cling to the hope obstinately.

Everything at the Gave d'Aspe is prospering. It was such a good idea of yours importing Gaston—and Jeanne—into the business. It seems to have quieted the French Government and the local préfet completely. Mme. de Lamelle is still at Pau, except when she goes on little tours. The local authorities have never been able quite to make her out, which is why I admire her cleverness. Of course, though her French is very good, they know it was not the language she was born with; but they take her generally for the widow of an Irish patriot, with a French name, who died in exile. But the French are not quite so rabidly against all British enterprise as they were, we having given in over Madagascar. I suppose you have had your papers and seen somewhere the conventions or treaties or whatever they were with France and Germany about East Africa and Madagascar?

I heard from your mother the other day. She says she has written to you about her plans, so it would be waste of paper space to describe them here—if you have had her letter. But it is nice to think of her going to live at Pau, near the Lamelle, and Georgy and Jeanne. Jeanne confided to me in her last letter that she hopes your brother Lancelot will *not* get himself transferred to the Pyrenees too, to join your mother,

as he has become very fanatical and mysterious and is always railing at the Jews; and at the same time gets too much money out of his mother for propaganda. But this reads badly, rather like mischief-making. Jeanne ought to be able easily to protect your mother, now she has come to live so near. And Mme. de Lamelle is splendid for cases like that—so skilfully, so indomitably rude.

I don't ask you to answer this letter. But just let me know you had it and that it did not hurt you, and I will try to write once a month till you are back. I'll write, if it's only to let you know how little Hetty gets on. It's so jolly having her at Chacely, and is doing mother *worlds* of good . . . making her look young again.

Your loving,
ELIZABETH.

P.S. I forgot to say we had a month's visit from Reggie in June—July. It helped to cheer mother up. He is full of the Zambezi and the Portuguese (whom he wants to fight, poor things!) but we thought him improved. Africa has done him good.

Santa Margarita,
Segovia,
Nicaragua.
October 3, 1890.

DEAREST ELIZABETH,

Your letter of June 30 has taken a long time to reach me; but Central American postal communications being what they are (though better than those in Venezuela), and my wanderings having been at times both abrupt and impulsive, I attach *no* blame to any one, in that I only received and read your letter of June 30 on October 1, in the northernmost part of this Republic. I have traversed this truly interesting country almost from the south to the north, but have chiefly

devoted myself to examining its flora and all its drug-yielding trees and plants along the mountainous centre. Nicaragua, fortunately, is much less earthquaky than Costa Rica where the shocks and tremors and the sight of ruined towns quite got on my nerves, and turned my thoughts away from my own sorrows.

The mountains here are disappointing after those of Costa Rica in that they are not nearly so high. Seven thousand feet seems to be about the highest, though *I* have been, so far as my aneroid tells me, nowhere above six thousand. But so much of Nicaragua is above two thousand feet that the climate—despite the *excessive* rainfall—is bearable, though I have managed, in my blundering way, to pass through the land in the very height of the rainy season! The annual rainfall in the eastern districts is 290 inches! It is heaviest in July, in which month alone over *fifty* inches fell this year! It used to begin whilst we were having lunch and continue till early the next morning. Between eight and twelve in the morning it would be sunny, with a blue and white sky. So that one could get out, botanise, and see the people and the amazing butterflies.

I will write this letter patiently and systematically, even if it takes me (in between botanising) a couple of days.

* * * * *

I should guess from the fossil remains that about five hundred thousand years ago, Central America teemed with strange mammals, travelling from South up to North America and from North down into South America. Elephants of four or five kinds and sabre-toothed tigers, camels of sorts, jaguars and pumas roamed through it; but it was too narrow, and perhaps too volcanic, to serve as a permanent home. Similarly, the monkeys which had penetrated into South America from Africa wandered north-westward into Colombia and Central America, but only in a few

species as compared with Brazil. Then there were the tapirs of the Old World. Tapirs are charming creatures—why does not some millionaire domesticate them? I should like to drive a pair of black and white Malayan tapirs in the Park. Well, these tapirs, in no very distant times, having ranged from Eastern Asia into North America fled before the cold of the awful Ice Ages into Central America, and so onward into the great southern enlargement, east of the Andes. They left behind, in Nicaragua and other parts of this central isthmus, two peculiar species, one of which I have seen.

The Ocellated Turkey and some other northern types of beast and bird only got as far south as Honduras, while the bulk of the South American creatures of ancient African origin stopped in their northern wanderings at Costa Rica.

Costa Rica is in some ways (I think) the beginning of "South" America; and "North" America ends in the pines and wolves of Nicaragua.

One curious testimony to this theory is the spread of the northern forms of Conifers (pine-trees). They reach south to the higher parts of Nicaragua, but do not attain to Costa Rica, though the mountains there are much loftier, often exceeding thirteen thousand feet. The Southern conifers of South America—Libocedrus, Araucarias or "monkey-puzzles"—do not seem to be found to-day north of the highest Andes in Colombia. I hope all this disquisition will not make you yawn!

Poor South America has been a rather shabbily treated continent by the Generator of our Life-force. It was once—up to the Andes—an extension of Africa, from which it was supplied with its fresh-water fish, its manati, most of its birds and mammals. Then in the late Tertiaries, through the West Indies and Central America, it became connected with North America and developed a wonderful backbone in the Andes.

North America, by way of Alaska, was then joined to Asia. So through the western side of North America and the new Isthmus south of Mexico, you have an Asiatic fauna and flora pouring into Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Guiana, Brazil, Bolivia, the Argentine and Patagonia. But many of these wonderful things only hurried over the Central American Isthmus, and did not rest till they made a new home in *South* America. Do you twig? Or does all this, which so helps to heal my wounded mind, simply bore you?

I had quite a thrill after leaving Costa Rica (where, as I said, the earthquakes upset my plans and checked my enthusiasm) in exploring the wonderful Nicaraguan flora for possible drug-producing trees and plants. It has done much, together with anxiety about food and lodging, mosquitos and vampire bats, ticks and extraordinary, bloodthirsty bugs (the Bug Order is At Home in warm America!) to rouse me from my despairing grief and give me a further interest in life.

Here are a few out of the five hundred striking features in the amazing vegetation, produced by a hot sun and an excessive rainfall out of a volcanic soil:

Huge fig trees—" Higuerones "—with whitish-grey, smooth branches, very dark-green foliage, pale-yellow, small figs, not eatable by man; but these trees provide the traveller with such complete, *clean* shade, that I always fancy insects are less troublesome in their vicinity.

Clumps of Royal palms with superb fronds and tall, smooth, whitish trunks; the ordinary coconuts (whether native or not—I cannot say), and an allied species the sap of which is a native " wine "; also low-growing Acrocomia wine palms along the river-sides or in the hills.

Cedrela odorata, an ally of the Mahogany tree (also found here) which has a deliciously-perfumed, dark-coloured timber. The Cortés or Cortesa tree, a species

of Tecoma (with relations in India). The Cortés has wood hard and black as ebony. In the rainy season, between May and October, its leaves fall, but the whole tree is entirely covered with brilliant yellow flowers, so that each fully grown tree makes a superb dome of yellow to be distinguished at a distance of four or five miles. When the sun is on these domes of flowers they are dazzling spectacles.

Croton bushes as large as lilac trees, with their masses of beautifully coloured leaves—yellow-green-orange, white, and pink.

The Poró tree, a species of Erythrina. The Erythrina trees of the Bean order are a joy of the tropics—America, India, Africa.

There are several species in Central America, but the largest and most noteworthy is the common Poró. This is mostly leafless in the summer, with smooth, grey branches; but *en revanche* it is, through all the rainy months, covered with tufts and masses of superb flowers of crimson-scarlet, each two to three inches long. Imagine the effect of these colour-masses against a cobalt sky and ask yourself whether they may not be some small degree of solace against such sadness as mine! They are also eccentric as well as gorgeous, for their seed vessels are enormous, almost like a Pantomime property—immensely prolonged, corrugated bean-pods, the beans of Brobdingnag!

Mimosa trees with foliage like a maidenhair fern.

Poinsettia bushes. The Poinsettia is a kind of Euphorbia. It has small, red, and yellow flowers, but surrounding these are the crimson leaf-bracts which make it such a gorgeous spectacle. But you have it in the greenhouses at Chacely. Here it grows like a weed and makes the outskirts of the forest very showy.

The hedges and roadside growth are full of colour and effect with large white begonias, violet mallows, and an Ageratum which ranges in tint from pinkish

white to sky blue. A low-growing Salvia (not at present in blossom) comes into flower at Christmas and turns open tracts—they say—into sheets of ultramarine blue. Indeed, as regards seasons, the wet is scarcely more wonderful for its flower displays than the dry. All the year round one sees six-feet-long sprays of yellow, rose-colour, white or brown-gold orchid flowers depending from the tree branches; or orchid spikes of magenta or cream-colour blossoms rising up from the grass.

And then for weirdness and fantasy, the Cacti! Tree cacti of contorted forms; writhing cacti like green snakes, which suddenly give birth to portentous leathery blossoms coloured and patterned like mid-nineteenth century wallpapers; tall Cereus cacti, like green columns with lovely, cream-white, scented flowers growing out at right angles from the stem; small, squat cacti with magenta flowers nearly as large as the whole plant. The Bromelias or pineapple-like plants grow on many of the tree-trunks and branches, and with their wonderful stores of pure water in their crevices, are a perfect Providence to monkeys and birds. Trees of the Castilloa genus yield quantities of india-rubber. The cultivated Theobroma tree gives us the chocolate of commerce; and an even more delicious chocolate is derived from Herrania purpurea. This is a shrub only found in San Salvador and northern Nicaragua. I cannot think why it has not been widely propagated, and am trying to send cuttings and seeds home to your father. I am sending duplicates to Jeanne—or rather to Gaston—because I think it is *just possible* it might do out of doors in the lowest and sunniest parts of our Pyrenees domain.

"Peruvian" Balsam is another Central American plant I should like to experiment with, as a perfume producer. Its name is quite misleading; it does *not* come from Peru, but mainly from Salvador. The en-

cyclopædias will tell you why it was misnamed: I have forgotten. But its range just strays into north-west Nicaragua, and its main home is Salvador. The "balsam" is the thick resin, almost black when dried and like the most fragrant incense. It pours from cuts in the bark, and the tall, richly foliaged tree belongs, as so many other good things do, to the gracious Bean order, a division of plants so wholly beneficial to Man that it should be honoured in our religion, and awarded the highest decoration at some International Exhibition.

Don't you think we are extraordinarily ungrateful to the Plant World? I think the most highly developed plants have a certain consciousness; they die "on" some people; they are touchingly grateful to others. Look at the alliance some plants make with insects and birds. There is, in Central America, in the drier upland parts, the Bull's Horn acacia which gives a home to a fierce little stinging ant in its enormous, white, black-tipped flattened horns, and in return is petted, defended, and generally looked after by the ants.

Perhaps, however, what charmed me most in Nicaragua was getting back to the Pines. It was like a foretaste of Europe, a suggestion of the Pyrenees. I did not distingiush more than one species—I think it is Pinus tenuifolia—but I dare say there are one or two other conifers above six thousand feet. But Pinus tenuifolia makes its appearance as low down as about four thousand feet and rules the forest above that in a lordly way, like a dominating European colonist, only permitting the rivalry of evergreen oaks.

The pine trees are very aromatic: one feels extraordinarily "well" travelling under them, as you can do with delicious freedom; for they allow nothing else, save a little bracken, to grow beneath their shade. Below the pines the Tillandsia creeper—"Spanish moss" (really a kind of pineapple!!)—festoons many of the trees with its grey wisps and curtains; and a kind of

prickly-pear cactus grows to a height of twenty or thirty feet.

But all that seems foreign. What gives one the delicious illusion of home are the not-too-crowded forests of pines through which a European atmosphere circulates.

This long letter must content you for the present. If I write you again before I come home I will tell you about the insects, the birds and beasts I have met in these travels. I shall, if it is not too difficult, earthquaky, and dangerous, travel from the north of Nicaragua into Salvador and then through Honduras to the British colony of that name; and, so—home. Meantime I hope the little child will prosper under your kind care—its survival has been a miracle—and that some time next year I shall be among you again.

Yours affectionately,
MERVYN.

Chacely Priory,
nr. Tewkesbury.
November 20, 1890.

DEAR MERVYN,

We haven't heard from you for some time, but I somehow feel you are getting better. I suppose you are right in your assumption that it requires at least a year's absence from home to heal your grief? Our business, however, is extending so considerably that we must increase our partnership to cope with it. I noticed in one of your last letters (May 12) you hinted your return might further be delayed by a journey through the United States to see Crabtree and Corness about your Central American discoveries. Our partnership is at present confined to you and me and Madison Corness. I am now fifty-nine. I think, unless the electors turn me out, I shall stop in Parliament till about the end of the century, certainly no longer.

But I cannot combine Parliamentary work for any extended period with strenuous and absorbing labours in Mincing Lane or with careful experiments at Chacely. In fact, after sixty, I ought to be relieved of office work altogether. I must enjoy myself a little!

I propose making Gaston a partner straightaway; and negotiating with his father for the virtual independence (yet close co-operation) of the French firm (you might become a director of *that*). And I should like to add eventually to our partnership here, George Sampson, so long the firm's faithful cashier. We ought really to have done this a year or two ago, but other things have distracted me.

You must bear in mind your eventual succession to the Headship of the firm. In course of time you will marry again. I am sure Hetty would have wished it. You may have a son, and he, in further process of events, should strengthen the Veneering connection with our discoveries and inventions.

Dear boy, the death of Hetty has wounded me in the spirit nearly as much as you: wounded me, embittered me, infuriated me. I ask myself—vainly—*why* I placed her in London at that period, why I agreed to Dr. —— being her accoucheur, why I allowed her—so far as my influence went—to visit women's hospitals at that stage in her life. But such "whys" and "wherefores" are fruitless. As some consolation I have resolved to devote my energies and spare time to the study of germ diseases—as they are now called—and to the complete extirpation or infallible cure of puerperal fever. You know the history of the investigation of this malady of childbirth? How it was first grappled with by Semmelweiss in the 'fifties in Vienna or Pesth; how he showed it to be due to Septicæmia. But a certain number of women still die of it every year in London and in other big cities; even some women like Hetty, who should have been protected

against infection and stupidity. I fear in our case either doctor or nurse was to blame. . . .

Am I wrong in reviving this core of your sorrow? If so, forgive me.

We are on the eve, I believe, of a mighty enlargement of human knowledge—which may now come in leaps and bounds—concerning those exceedingly minute organisms that are the causes, the base of most diseases. It is shocking to think of the death, from typhoid, of Lady Rosebery (which occurred yesterday), shocking because she did a great deal of good and because typhoid ought to be first preventable and secondly curable in any one under sixty years of age.

I shall await your drug samples and botanical collections with the greatest interest, and so will the people at Kew.

Reggie has had the time of his life (he tells me) shooting big game in Mashonaland. Alas! He belongs to the old-fashioned type that cares only to kill, cares nothing for the life-study of mammals and birds.

Well! I had better close this letter here: I seem to be in rather a grumbling mood. I should like to close it, however, on the assertion that Madison is a right down good fellow and, in your absence and my two sons' defection, I should be lost without him.

Come home soon, my dear boy.

Your affectionate father-in-law,
JOHN HARMON.

Ocotal,
River Coco,
Nicaragua.
Decr. 2, 1890.

DEAREST ELIZABETH,

Write a line—will you? to Jeanne and tell her I got her most informative letter about what Gaston and she were doing at the Gave d'Aspe and it encour-

aged me much. I will reply to it from Honduras, when I get in touch with the post again. Or perhaps not until I get to British Honduras, whence the mail service will be more certain.

Here for your amusement and, I humbly hope, your interest are the rest of my rough notes on Nicaragua. In my last letter I told you something about its flora; now for its visible fauna.

I say "visible" because I have only time and space to deal with large things or the visible small things which absolutely thrust themselves on one's attention. I dare say there are microscopic animalcules of the highest importance which at present—till Man has full power—hold the fate of Nicaragua in their hands or jaws.

The first thing a scientific man ought to notice in this country or adjacent parts of Central America is a species of Peripatus like a long, large, handsome, silky, pleasant-dispositioned caterpillar. Peripatus resembles very closely the original form of some many-legged creature which, about twenty millions of years ago, originated the insects, centipedes, and millipedes. It is a great privilege to have met him and sent him to South Kensington for identification.

It is not Man that rules in Central America, yet, so much as insects, and most of all insects the ants. A reflective person is amazed at their power and at the same time thankful that they wage such war on one another and on the lesser vertebrates that we are still able to subsist. The most noteworthy types for interference with man's comfort are the awful Army Ants —Eciton genus—and the Leaf-cutting Ants (Œcodoma?). The ordinary Eciton workers are only a quarter of an inch long, but their soldiers are longer and armed with huge heads and pincer muzzles. They seem to have only temporary nests and to lead a life of incessant migration, marching in armies of thousands

or millions, carrying their larval forms and attacking and nipping all living things along their line of route. They devour all the insects and spiders they meet and attack; overcome and eat up the lizards, small mammals and birds which cannot get away. They would similarly devour any human being that was tied down along their line of march. Their tremendous raids are accompanied overhead by flying birds of prey which pounce on the little beasts and reptiles or the large insects running before the ant advance. Consequently these ant armies do rid the country of some of the food-crop pests.

Some species of ant are closely related with the economy of hollow trees; that is to say shrubs have been developed into hollow trees to suit the ants' purposes who live inside them. The acacia, which is called the Bull's Horn tree, has developed its huge pairs of black-tipped, white, hollow thorns as homes for a small species of angry little ant which effectually defends the tree against all its enemies and plays an important part in developing and cleaning its foliage. And there is a gigantic species of ant over an inch long, black in colour and armed with a very venomous sting, which defends the flowers that provide its honey.

The leaf-cutting ants are a confounded nuisance, especially in attacking all foreign forms of vegetation that are being introduced for horticulture. Unless prevented by defences of various kinds they will soon reduce a garden to ruin. They cut up the leaves into round patches and carry them off to their burrows to serve as a feeding ground for a minute fungus on which the ant lives. One's larder and storeroom have to be specially protected against ant-raids; in some districts you cannot sit down to a meal without the chance of an ant attack. Man will have to master the ant all over tropical America or his work will come to nothing.

A really hateful order is that of the Bugs. I doubt

if anywhere there is a good or commendable Bug (from our point of view). Tropical America possesses every bad and daring form of bed-bug, which is why we very sensibly sleep in hammocks. Some of the bugs are handsome—even gorgeous in colour; but all possess a disgusting odour and some are positively venomous in their probes.

Beetles. I should think Central America is the climax of Beetledom. There are Megasoma beetles five to six inches long, the bulkiest insects in the world of to-day: there are Euchroma goliath beetles three and a half inches in length and vividly green, rose and purple; and Scarabs, strangely horned, that measure over three inches in length. There are fast-running tiger-beetles, not obnoxious to us, because in pursuit of our insect enemies; silvery gold Lamellicorns; brilliant metallic green Chrysomelids; and Longicorn beetles heavily plumed in their grub form, like hairy caterpillars. Among the beetles, I think it is only the weevils that are an active and continual danger here to Man's interests.

There never was such a region as this for Butterflies and Moths, either in quantity, or quality of colour and size of wings. The Timetes butterfly, with downward-striped brown wings, flies at certain seasons in millions—out to sea, I hope—from north-west to south-east. The Morpho butterflies measure four to five inches across the wings and are either wholly a metallic cobalt blue, or the glistening blue or azure is relieved by a band of bright yellow. The "Owl" butterflies have great "eyes" of black, brown, and white painted on their lower wings. Many of the Papilio genus are white, green and black in colour. Others are black and scarlet, dark and pale blue, bright orange with black borders. On moist, shady patches of ground a host of gorgeously-coloured butterflies may lie like a scattered nosegay. Then at some alarm they will rise together

like a fountain. One species of hawk-moth measures twelve and a half inches across the wings. Its body is more than three inches long. Some of the day-flying moths are a beautiful, dark, velvety blue.

In this region may be seen the largest Dragon-flies now existing; though I dare say you will know that in the Primary epoch there were dragon-flies two feet long, with wings three feet across. However, to-day the Megaloprepus, with a body five inches in length and a wing-spread of seven inches, takes some beating. Most of the large and small dragon-flies of Central America are of bright colours—cobalt blue, violet, black and orange, coral-red, chestnut-brown—with the gauzy wings boldly marked with a single dark blue or black spot.

Very often in scanning the terminal boughs of trees or bushes you will see a twig moving and realise that you are looking at a walking-stick insect—an exact imitation of a stem with six lichen-covered branches. The grasshoppers, locusts and "katydids" are often large, with monstrously ugly horse-heads; sometimes with fat bodies abruptly bent back, and immensely developed thighs to their leaping legs.

Wasps are here in great numbers. The majority of them interfere very little with man, except by building nests or cells of mud inside his dwellings and stuffing them with paralysed grubs; but there is a small kind of wasp or bee (I always call a *bad* bee a "wasp") which attacks you when you approach its hidden nests. They settle on face and neck but will only sting you inside hair, so if you are shaven you escape!

The large kinds of wasp, if you really infuriate them, strike direct at the naked face.

Leaving the horrid subject of insects, I might just allude to the beautifully coloured and quaintly marked tree frogs of this region. They are so beautiful and so whimsical in shape and colour that one wonders no

fashion for keeping them as pets has set in. All these regions of Tropical America (except the large West India Islands) teem with snakes of more or less deadly nature, boa constrictors, coral snakes, rattle snakes, and pit vipers; but they are scarcely ever to be seen and you hardly ever hear of a native being bitten. Central America has large and extraordinary vegetarian lizards —the Iguanas—living on trees by the waterside. Some of these develop leaflike expansions of the skin which assimilate them very much to the vegetation in a man's eyes.

As to Alligators, there do not seem to be any here in *Central* America, except in the imagination of the unscientific; but there is a real crocodile in all the large eastern-flowing rivers (not however very aggressive); and there are formidable caimans like those of Brazil in the Lake of Nicaragua. But no one seems to bother much about them as they do in Africa, India, Australia or the Amazon Basin.

In fact, I don't know that after *insects* one thinks much about other forms of life in this region, save *birds*. If it is an insect country it is also Bird-land. I must remember *time* and collecting duties and meals and the weight of letters, so I can't go into many details. I can only mention, hurriedly, the amazingly beautiful Quetzal Trogon which just extends its range to the region where I am writing. Go and look at the specimens next time you are up in London. It is the male, of course, that is so remarkably lovely. Look also at the Motmots with their self-trimmed tail-feathers, the curl-crested Curassows, the screaming blue-and-yellow and scarlet-blue-and-yellow macaws, the Amazon parrots and Tirika parrakeets, the conures, and the tiny, exquisitely coloured parrotlets. Glance at the humming birds—black and azure, and ruby-red, blazing orange, emerald-green, snowy white, vivid violet; crested, diademed, long billed, ruffed, plumed, gor-

getted, frilled. Picture them quarrelling, bathing, swooping, hovering. Then the large and glossy woodpeckers, jet black with ivory bills and flaming red crests; the Toucans smugly black and discreetly crimson, with beaks like mother of pearl in tint, one fourth as long as the bird itself. Or other and smaller toucans, coloured, beak and body, like the flowering bushes on which they sit. And bee-eaters—miracles of loveliness; shrikes and flycatchers of which you might say the same.

Even the birds of prey have beauty in their colouring or posture, as well an invigorating testimony to fierceness. The King Vulture is admittedly the most charming in coloration of all the birds of prey: a head and neck, humorously wattled, of bare skin, coloured orange, violet, and crimson, a yellow-brown beak, white irised eyes, a dark-grey neck ruff, its back and the upper part of its wings warm cream-colour; cream-white under parts, and the lower wings and tail, black. The female, I must admit, is disappointingly dull-coloured. The other vultures are either black all over, including their naked heads; or they have scarlet heads and black-brown plumage.

Amongst the small birds the Tanagers—a "low" kind of finch—are noteworthy for their glistening-colour beauty: black with crimson and sky blue; scarlet with black wings and tail; violet, yellow, and steely blue; cornflower blue with white, crimson-blotted crests. Yet these lovely creatures which ought to be objects of worship in our eyes, and of thankfulness for their incessant attacks on insects harmful to man, are becoming the chief attraction in Central America for the vile plumage hunters from the United States and France. Why don't you and your sister and all the women friends you can influence rise to the attack here, and only wear the plumage of domesticated birds——?

As for the mammals of this wonderful region, there

you meet with disappointment. There are vexatious and destructive little opossums, dull-witted ugly armadillos, black and white, filthy smelling skunks and other large weasels, deer of small size with very simple antlers, two special kinds of Tapir restricted to Central America in their range, two kinds of Peccary—an American type of pig very different from those of the Old World. These Peccaries emit a scent like strong onions, and unless the scent glands are at once cut out from a killed beast the flesh is uneatable. Otherwise it is a gamey pork, not at all bad. There are, of course, all sorts of rodents; I think there are even one or two hares; but nothing in this order of outstanding interest that I know of. A small wolf—a coyote—comes as far south as the uplands of Nicaragua as a sort of announcement of North American claims; and there are three types of American monkeys—the Spider monkeys with a very long tail, the white-faced Cebus, and the fearfully-howling Mycetes.

And as to the Human species: I should think between Guatemala and the end of the Panama Isthmus there were about four hundred and fifty thousand more or less pure-blooded Indians left—yellow-olive skins, long black head-hair, prominent cheek bones, slightly aquiline noses, long and bulky bodies, long arms, and short legs: usually gentle and silent, dull-seeming, hard-working, credulous devotees of the Roman Catholic faith—where converted: a race seemingly without much hope of salvation save by marriage with the half-Spaniard or the negro. They are — generally — so plainly ugly and so without graceful bodily proportions that I find it hard to interest myself in their fate, despite their sad history and their unrewarded industry, their love of birds and flowers. There are not many negroes in Central America except in British Honduras and on the east side of Nicaragua and in Panamá. But although they may have brutal, ugly

faces (not always) they have well proportioned, handsome bodies. They are alive! They are full of energy. They are in touch with Europe, are in some way linked up with the white man, though they may have suffered egregiously at his hands.

There is a kind of Spanish aristocracy (with commingled Swiss, Italians and French) in Costa Rica, in Nicaragua, and—I am told—in Guatemala; white in blood and in traditions, and still to a great extent the government of these lands. But the coming governing population is of the Spanish-Indian hybrid type, who will not recognise any difference between them and the White Spaniard.

This element is to blame for the sickening revolutions and the civil wars which break out in each of the republics every two or three years; but, do you know, I think we take them too little into account? They breed fast; and even though there is a high death-rate they are increasing, doubling in numbers every ten years. They are much more industrious than our writers make out, and somehow or other they are getting on. They are going to be—this rather good-looking mixture between Spaniard and Indian—the dominant race some day, in many millions, between the southern frontier of the United States and Tierra del Fuego. Personally, because I can speak Spanish after a fashion and because I am civil spoken, and even if in a hurry strive not to show it, I get on with them very well.

In the northern part of Nicaragua there are many descendants of the English and French buccaneers from the West Indies. Their fair complexions are very much tanned, and they only speak the corrupt Nicaraguan Spanish. Like all the other "civilised" Nicaraguans they are addicted—priests quite as much as laymen—to cock-fighting, to which Sunday afternoons are devoted. It is rather a blood-stained sport,

but not so cruel in mortality as has been made out, and after all, the cocks thoroughly enjoy it and the way they are made much of. It is, in reality, a very much "purer" sport than our horse-racing, with its horrible breed of "bookies"; and if the cocks were consulted they would sooner live and fight for about eight years than be killed at one year old and roasted. When on business bent they wear smart steel sickles neatly fastened to their real spurs and are quite joyously excited when these are being fastened on.

As to the "civilised" houses of this and adjoining countries, they are usually of only one storey because of earthquakes. The new, "cheap" house is frightful with its corrugated iron roof, an execrable material for ugliness, heat, noise, and other hateful qualities; yet a great resister of rainfall. But the average decent house has a handsome red-tiled roof, and as the roof grows old it becomes trimmed and variegated by green and grey lichens, ferns and house-leeks, tiny cacti and daisies in all its crevices and depressions.

For means of getting about we mostly ride meek steeds of the Spanish type, or mules, or even donkeys. Much of the transport away from the rare railways is conveyed by ox-carts, about the same in structure and breed of oxen as they were in Spain in the sixteenth century, or under the Roman Empire.

Our food consists mainly of cheese made from cow's milk; maize cakes ("tortillas"), broiled chicken, fish from rivers or coast, stewed beef, beef-sausages, omelettes, coffee and milk with brown sugar, and bananas in many forms; desserts also of oranges, pineapples and other tropical fruits. This fare quite contents *me*. In fact, I want to express the opinion in winding up that but for earthquakes and earth-tremors and its revolutions, Central America would come nearer to the Earthly Paradise than any part of the world I have come to know.

And now I really must close or the post will refuse this letter. Give little Hetty a squeeze and a kiss for me, and believe me

Your affectionate and grateful
MERVYN.

P.S. I have sent father a business-like statement of projected dates and addresses between here and British Honduras; and the intervening stays between B.H. and London. I expect to be back home by next June.

CHAPTER XV

GRAVES'S DISEASE

GEORGY PODSNAP had not always been impeccably wise since she came to live with Mme. de Lamelle in the Pyrenees, in 1876. Two or three years later she had taken a whimsical fancy, a liking, not even confided to Mme. de Lamelle, to a young apprentice in a draper's shop in Oloron. She called at the shop, rather frequently, to make small purchases; talked her imperfect French with the young draper, who was not only good-looking—he came from Bayonne—but pleasant-mannered and of instinctive gentility. Georgy, being most anxious at that time to acquire French thoroughly, took to following a French Manuel de Correspondance to master the exact style of writing letters current in France in the middle of the nineteenth century. She could not have found—at any rate then, in the Pyrenees—any such guide in print *less* than twenty years old in style and application; so that her drafted letters necessarily had an old-world ring about them—suggested crinolines at their worst, intense respect for the credences of the Church of Rome, devout references to the Imperial family, and an imprisonment of style so characteristic of the France of *la bienséance* in those days.

Half humorously she connected with the name of this young draper the letters of an orphan lady, *d'age mûre,* having only herself to rely on, and dealing with the respectfully-communicated love of a gentleman proposing marriage in a roundabout way. It amused

and rather thrilled her in her own sitting-room, with her gilded walnut desk, and generally, while her elder companion was having a nap, to deal with the supposititious case of the young draper. Supposing—just for fun—he should *really* have taken a liking to her, after their constant conferences over embroidery designs and coloured silk threads for executing floral embroideries. Supposing he should have become so utterly mad as to imagine *for one minute* she could leave her beloved Sophie to become his wife and the mother of his children, and to put some of her money into his drapery business, and that, risking all, he *dared* to put these aspirations into French writing: how should she answer him, with dignity, yet without cruelty, and in a French which no one could mock at as the French of a foreigner?

So while her friend slept, or more likely read a rather *risqué* novel in undress on a comfortable couch, with her stays off, Georgy wrote these letters, unfortunately with the name attached of the prepossessing young draper. Several of them she tore up, becoming conscious, as she progressed, of painful errors in spelling and grammar; but two or three of her drafts seemed so good, so faultless and dignified in style, that she was seduced by an author's vanity to preserve them, as she thought, in the secret drawer of her desk—an article of furniture which her mother had given her as a present on her twenty-first birthday.

But either she left one or two of these drafts in a blotting book, or in an album of views, or an old school atlas, or the maid who dusted the room had for long amused herself, when they were out at the plantations, by opening the desk (almost any small key would do that) and running an experienced eye over Mademoiselle's affairs. Two of these letters got abstracted and found their way to the astonished eyes of Aristide Boucanesse. He was aflame with ambition. The age

—presumably well under forty—of Mademoiselle mattered nothing—elle était Anglaise, et il aimait beaucoup les Anglais—there was no need for her to concern herself with the wretched shop of his *patron:* at Bayonne leurs affaires pouvaient s'évoluer. Il y connaissait un établissement——

These tumultuous phrases were poured out to a calm and dignified Mme. de Lamelle, who had consented to see him (Georgy in terror having locked herself into her two rooms). She explained that the English were like that. She herself was not English—Irish, and now French; but there were qualities in that people one had to admire, traits de caractère, cependant, qu'il y avait à regretter. C'était un jeu, difficile à expliquer, but the person who had put before . . . Monsieur?—pardon—Monsieur Boucanesse's eyes these portions of the game had acted with the grossest indiscretion. She could understand the pain this must have caused Monsieur, especially as he was commonly supposed to be engaged to—to—his *patron's* niece. Monsieur would do well to forget the absurdity and to return the letters which were without addressed envelopes and had evidently been abstracted from Mademoiselle Podsnap's appartement. Il y aurait une enquête à faire là-dessus, and it would be preferable for Monsieur, at his age and in his condition, to be unconnected in any way with such an inquiry. The police were severe on any young man who made use of such a coincidence to annoy strangers of distinction——

A few other phrases suggesting ever so slightly and delicately that this stately lady, despite her un-Pyrenees style of pronouncing French, was not without police acquaintances, sufficed to reduce to nothing the hopes and projects of Monsieur Aristide. He returned sulkily to his work at the shop, having somehow been hypnotised into leaving behind the two letters involving *la richissime Anglaise* in his heart's affairs.

But shortly afterwards Mme. de Lamelle called there and had a talk with his *patron;* the marriage with the patron's niece became thereafter a matter of the immediate future, and before Mme. de Lamelle and Miss Podsnap departed on a customary tour, M. Aristide Boucanesse had received from her and from Miss Podsnap a wedding present of fifty pounds, in acknowledgement of M. Boucanesse's assistance to the last-mentioned lady in transcribing the Basque songs of the Pyrenees.

Then there followed years of increasing industry and happiness in which Georgy learnt to ride—after a fashion, learnt to help greatly in the business of the botanical plantations, became and showed herself greatly interested in the affairs of Harmon, Veneering and Co., and notably of Mervyn Veneering. She and her friend were present at Mervyn's wedding, as already related. When Mervyn brought his wife to stay with him at the Gave d'Aspe plantation after their honeymoon, Georgy's interest in and close connection with the Gave d'Aspe became intensified. Then came the departure of Mervyn and his wife for London, Hetty's restricted life in London, and the substitution of Jeanne and Gaston for Mervyn and Hetty at the Gave d'Aspe.

Jeanne was a perfect dear, and Mervyn's sister, and she had first two children and then, in 1889 and 1891, two more, so that she was a good deal occupied with her nursery and less with drug cultivation. Under Gaston the business took great extensions. The Scottish botanist reverted to the service of the London firm and was sent to the highlands of the Madras province, and French botanists took his place, who had no difficulty whatever in communicating the results of their observations and experiments to their French colleagues. Jeanne was the greatest dear; of that Georgy

was obstinately convinced; but Gaston—Gaston after the first few weeks of politeness and cap-lifting and jolly chaff seemed to betray a—a—little impatience and brusquerie when this elderly young lady (she was then forty-seven—let us suppose—and did not realise it), when this "vieille fille d'Londres" trotted about the paths and lanes of the plantations, uninvited, unexpected, and full of amiable inquiries.

No doubt some things were not doing quite so well since Mervyn had left. But that was more immediately the affair of the new managers, and these questions, uttered in French with a very English accent à la longue se portèrent sur les nerfs and answers were short or wanting.

Mme. de Lamelle guessed much of this without being told, or occasionally had a straight tip from Gaston, who himself immensely respected the intelligence and strength of the old lady. So Georgy was adroitly kept away from the Gave d'Aspe and occupied with Pau problems, or with little journeys, or visits to England. But the death of Hetty, the utterly cruel sequel to the wedding so happily ushered in at Chacely in the Christmas of 1887, had turned her thoughts once more towards diseases and their cure, and specially the diseases of women. She herself, at the beginning of 1891 had reached a stage in life when the woman's constitution is undergoing a change, a *retrécissement,* as her French doctor delicately phrased it. She devoted herself with more assiduity than ever to the study of medical works, suspected her perfectly healthy body of this and that tendency, sighed at the thought of an approaching death in—say—three years.

Somewhere about April, 1891, she had arrived at the dreadful conclusion that she was suffering from Graves's Disease. Who "Graves" was and whether it was Mr. or Mrs., her bulky Manual did not inform her; but there was an alternative title which took it

away from being the exclusive property of the Graves family. If you were learned you called it "Exophthalmic goitre."

She shuddered at the sub-title. Goitres were things that she connected with the lower classes in Switzerland and the Pyrenees. That some form of goitre, and that an ultimately dangerous one, should have attacked her, surrounded by every comfort, was lamentable. Yet here were the "flushings and shiverings," the neuralgic headaches, hyperæsthesia—which her dictionary told her meant "exaggerated sensibility"—vertigo, hallucinations of sight—had she not mistaken the postman for Joseph the other day?—or hearing; tremors of the hands, thyroid enlargement—that was evident by looking in the glass—and exophthalmus or protrusion of the eyeballs. She further saw in the Manual that, had she not been properly brought up—the qualification was hers—she would have exhibited "perverted sensations of love." As to the exophthalmus, she was nearly certain it already affected her rather prominent eyes, but it was best detected by seating a patient in a chair and standing behind him or her to look down the forehead. . . . Ulceration of the cornea took place later on and affirmed the condition.

The book, even, didn't say "him or her." It said "her" because this was practically a female disease, over 95 per cent. of the cases arising in connection with feminine disorders. There was Mœbius's sign—"insufficient convergence of the two eyes when looking at a near point"—and she had always exhibited a tendency to squint, especially when mentally upset.

An early recognition of this disease was very important, if you hoped for a cure. A certain Denton Cardew had thought that galvanism—she remembered dimly galvanism in connection with the Polytechnic of her youth—galvanism was the best treatment. But

alas!—another doctor had said this *increased* the growth of the vascular excitement.

Patients sometimes suffered from Epistaxis, which, however, was a not unfavourable sign. What, oh *what,* was Epistaxis? A dictionary told her it was nose-bleeding. But that settled it! Her nose had frequently bled of late. All heroic silence as to her condition here gave way, and she sought her friend and sobbingly told her of her grave condition.

"Nonsense; many times *nonsense,* my dear Georgy, said Mme. de Lamelle, when these fears were communicated one day in early May, 1891. "You are entering on a new stage in life which all women, who outlive their youth, have to pass through, and presently you will be stronger and happier than ever. Do look at yourself in the glass, my dear, if you doubt my opinion. You are a *little* too stout for your height; I think p'raps your eyes are a little strained by reading without glasses; and, as there is no need for you to earn your living as a woman doctor, I am decidedly of opinion that you might give up—at any rate for a while, reading about diseases. We'll go and see, one day, the new oculist who's come to Pau—about spectacles, I mean—if you *must* read. But, as we are perfectly free agents, let's see something of the Pyrenees on the other side! We've lived here untold years—what is it? Fifteen?—and never crossed into Spain. All our travels have been up and down the French side, or to Paris, England, Italy. Let's see something of Spain, now all that silly Carlist business has died down.

"I heard, by the bye, from Bella Harmon this morning. Poor Mervyn is coming back. . . . Ought to be home in June. Dare say he'll be over here in the autumn, to see how things are getting on. He'll be surprised at the extensions, won't he? I'll have an-

other slice of pineapple—really, they are very good. . . . Come from Marseilles, I suppose. . . . Only dessert you can get this time of year. I think we ought to make digestive tabloids out of pineapple. Chemists say its juice is very eupeptic. You can give me another cup of coffee."

Georgy: "Here's your pineapple; and—here's—your coffee. . . . I see the Empress Eugénie is in Aragon; left her yacht at Barcelona, to stay at some Spanish chateau."

Mme. de Lamelle: "Well, *I* saw it before you did. When I was looking at the *Gazette de Pau* over my *petit déjeuner.* And I thought — do you remember those extraordinary days of the Paris Exhibition? Eighteen sixty-seven? which seem removed from us by *centuries!*—I thought, even if we only had a glimpse of her, it would be interesting, worth the journey. . . . I'm getting near seventy, do you know? Shall be seventy in September. P'raps after seventy I may become too stiff for adventurous journeys. Besides, I am looking forward to seeing Mervyn in the summer or autumn. . . . I vote we go to Spain now and return by Barcelona and Perpignan. Then we can look at Gaston's new plantations in the Eastern Pyrenees. Much more sun but much less rain. However, I hear they are a great success."

Georgy: "All right! When shall we go?"

Mme. de Lamelle: "To-day's Friday. Let's start Tuesday. . . . Tuesday's my lucky day. We'll drive in to the station this afternoon. You might tell Joseph when you write out the orders—and make inquiries."

Accordingly, on the Tuesday following, they started from Pau, joined the Paris-Madrid express at Bayonne, and left it at Alsásua to diverge to Pamplona.

Here they stayed some days. Georgy was enraptured with its picturesqueness, but Mme. de Lamelle commented rather caustically on the fleas of the Cathe-

dral and its disheartening mixture of Gothic and eighteenth-century Corinthian architecture. They went to see a bull-fight in the great arena, amid an audience of seven or eight thousand shouting, swearing, laughing, gesticulating Basques and Navarrese: Georgy was inexpressibly pained at the cruelties inflicted by the bulls on the picadors' horses, by the final death-thrust delivered to the gallant bulls, and, a little less, by the tossing of a picador and the shriek he uttered when his arm was broken. Mme. de Lamelle bore the ordeal more stoically, because Georgy seemed to have forgotten completely her own state of health in her indignation over Spanish cruelties.

From Pamplona they passed down the line to the great city of Zaragoza; strange mixture of tortuous, narrow streets, lined with lofty walls of Aragonese palaces, roughly paved; and broad, straight, modern, sunny avenues of modern shops and business-houses, hotels and cafés: the nineteenth century brought close up against the fourteenth. Zaragoza was delightful in May, almost the only month out of the twelve wherein it is tolerable in temperature, neither frying hot nor icy cold. In May, performances had begun in the roofless theatres under the stars and the moon; the air was scented with lilac and syringa; from six p.m. to midnight there was an undercurrent of music, especially in the old and mysterious part of the town. The shops were so attractive, the service in them so civil that it was a pleasure to spend money on things you did not want. Sophie and Georgy naturally thought from these qualities of Zaragoza in May that it was quite the nicest place in the world, whereas——

The day after their arrival they hired a comfortable landau at their comfortable hotel and drove through and round the town and out into the country in the plain of the Ebro. At a place on the road some three miles beyond the city's suburbs, where a group of

caroub trees gave shade, they saw a party of four people standing and strolling round a carriage and a pair of unusually fine, well-groomed horses. Seemingly there had been a slight accident to the carriage, the snapping of a shaft, nothing very serious, and the trouble was being tranquilly repaired by the coachman, while a lackey, in a well-cut, sombre livery, held the horses. The four people who had got out to look about them and glance at the great dusty plain and the distant city, consisted of a rather obese, pale-faced gentleman, with a brown-grey moustache and whiskers, an arched nose, and rather cruel eyes; a spare-figured, alert man of advanced middle age, with a grey moustache and beard and keen, dark eyes; a handsome blonde woman of about thirty-five with insolent blue eyes; and a much older woman of an indefinable stateliness, neither short nor tall, with a well-proportioned figure and a face which the beholder seemed to have seen many times before in old associations: a face of undeniable beauty, though the eyes had heavy lids, the hair, under some suggestion of a widow's hat, was grey, and the nose bridge what one might call undulating; but, however you criticised it, an arresting face of remarkable distinction.

There was no doubt in Mme. de Lamelle's mind as to the identity of this figure: the sight of it — she had stopped her carriage and her eyes were for a few seconds interlocked with those of this elderly lady—recalled the opening of the Paris Exhibition, in April, 1867, the unrehearsed stay of the Imperial couple before her stall at the Loge de Béarn, the ball at the British Embassy, when their eyes had again met and she had exerted all her will power over the vacillating Deirdre O'Connor.

Then she turned to the younger Spanish lady, who was of that dominating Gothic type which still rules Spain.

"Pouvons nous vous être de service, Madame?" she asked in a voice she strove to render nonchalant.

"Merci, mais nous n'avons besoin de rien. Mon cocher a fait la réparation nécessaire, et nous pourrons continuer jusqu'à chez nous."

The tone was polite but conclusive, definite. The hotel coachman turned his head and said in Spanish, and in a low voice: "El Conde y la Condesa de Monegros," almost as though he announced a royalty. Sophie inclined her head to the announcement, but once more looked at the elder lady, who bowed to her with the gracious dismissal of a ruler. Their hotel carriage drove on and presently she turned to the not much interested Georgy and said:

"*That* was the ex-Empress."

"Oh!" said Georgy, jumping up and turning her head and neck (quite forgetful of the dangers of sudden movements in Graves's Disease). "Oh, *do* let me look! Oh, *why* didn't you tell me at the time?"

"How could I? We could not force ourselves on them, unless they had given us some slight encouragement. All the same, it was very interesting and brought back to me most vividly the last time I saw her —at the British Embassy in Paris, in the Exhibition year . . . 1867."

She had never told her younger friend the exact circumstances of that evening, of how she came, in what quality, to be a seeming guest of the British Embassy on that memorable occasion. And it was just that reticence about her life that constituted half the attraction she possessed in Georgy Podsnap's mind. Georgy had never been told any falsehood; she had, even in earlier days and in moments of unusual clear-headedness, thought, conscientiously, that she *should* have felt shocked over this or that admission or statement made by dearest Sophie. But the irreconcilability of all the known circumstances of Sophie's life,

memories now dim, of seeming difficulties in Sophie's and Alfred's London life in the early 'sixties as contrasted with Alfred's sufficient means at Monte Carlo and Sophie's impeccable finance at Oloron and Pau, and the respect borne towards her by the French police, left her companion with just a pleasant sense of mystery-never-to-be-solved about her friend. The full story might only have pained her. She preferred to draw up, in dreamy thoughts, her own explanations. Perhaps she had been the Empress's or the British Ambassador's foster-sister. There had been such things as late as the first half of the nineteenth century. Or her Sophie—she blushed as she phrased the thought—might have been the—the—natural daughter of some royal personage, some connection of the Empress's, married to a superior kind of lackey—to Alfred—in short. When she had first encountered them in London their name certainly was spelt Lammle. Yet, for years and years and years, both had adopted a French rendering, no doubt the correct one, de Lamelle. Harrogate, somehow, she connected hap-hazardly with an early evolution of Sophie. That was a little inexplicable, because Harrogate in those days was completely irreconcilable with Continental romance. Sophie had had an aunt at Harrogate whom she had disliked. . . . But the Empress had certainly looked long and fixedly at her friend—might, perhaps, seek her out later at the hotel, in disguise, and discuss old state secrets. The whole mystery, at any rate, was so thrilling and romantic that it banished from her mind the last lingering thoughts of Graves's Disease; and she had such an appetite when she returned to the Zaragoza hotel that she had to ask for chocolate and biscuits, since afternoon tea was still an impossibility in unregenerate Spain.

As to the other party, with its barouche and pair of

high-stepping horses, which had halted under the clump of olive trees: the lady deemed to be the Empress Eugénie probably said—half one's story of people's lives has, on a favourable estimate, to be guesswork—she probably said in Spanish (of which I supply a summarised translation): "Eugenia, my dear—are you ready to go on? Well, then, Pietri, let us get in. Eugenia! That woman's face arrested me, troubled my thoughts. . . . Where have I seen her before and heard her rather English-sounding French? It is extraordinary, but as she looked at me and when she spoke, my thoughts at once went back to the opening of our Exposition in 1867. . . . And not only that, but I seem to connect her with a ball they gave us at the English Embassy, when I danced with the Prince of Wales. We were very anxious that night lest there should be any attempt made by the Fenians. . . . There were many detectives present. . . . Perhaps she was one of them. . . . She has a striking face."

For the remainder of their stay at Zaragoza, Georgy was unusually discreet in regard to bursting suddenly into her friend's society in bedroom or sitting-room lest she might surprise her in shrouded confidences with the lady who had once been Empress of the French. Mme. de Lamelle, however, made no further reference to the afternoon meeting; and, when three more days had elapsed, suggested they should move on another stage towards the Eastern Pyrenees and Perpignan, where there might be letters to be read and attended to.

So the railway took them to Tarragona, where Sophie said she desired to make inquiries about the preparation of salad vinegar, which she believed had a pronounced medicinal effect, but where also there were some of the most interesting monuments of Spain, going back, like the name, to Iberian and Carthaginian

days, and especially illustrating the power of Republican and Cæsarean Rome. The week's stay in Tarragona finally cured Georgy of any further anxiety as to Graves's or any other disease. One side of it was so romantic and the sea so boisterously bracing; and the other side so businesslike, so full of cheerful noise and best endeavour. This modern town had a large British factory which did useful things in steel, and its bright, well-educated, good-looking directors came for their meals to the hotel, and in the nice way that people do abroad, got into conversation with the very intelligent Mme. de Lamelle and told her much that she wanted to know about Tarragon Vinegar, which was quite unfoundedly connected with the name of Tarragon (being really "Vinaigre d'Estragon").

Their guide-book told them more about Tarragon's truly imposing, Roman history from two hundred years *before* Christ down to the coming of the Visigoths in the fifth century A.C., and how, even under the Christian Goths, it went on being Roman till the Moorish blight in the eighth century. Georgy was so thrilled by the prehistoric, the Carthaginian, the Roman remains; the close proximity of the sea; the Roman aqueduct and ruined amphitheatre; the Cathedral, which in the main dated from early Christian times; the prison, which was once a Roman palace inhabited, according to Spanish tradition, by Pontius Pilate; and by the fishermen's quarter, in which all the houses are painted pale blue: that she expressed an intention of coming to Tarragona every year, and even of settling there in its outer suburbs—all olives and almond trees, vines and walnuts, and picturesque country-houses like those of Ancient Rome—perhaps the style never died out.

Mme. de Lamelle said nothing to check these effusions, trusting to the dulling influence of time and the perfect comfort of the Pau villa. Nevertheless, even she had begun to find rather trying the attempt of Mrs.

Veneering to make a home in the same place, and the stays with her—longer and longer—of the sly, pompous, fanatical Lancelot, with his aspirations to meddle in the *haute politique* of the Church of Rome.

But after leaving Tarragona—with or without a settlement of the vinegar question—they made their way, with one night in a politically-agitated Barcelona, to Perpignan. They were back in France, and even the extraordinary ancientry of Tarragona could not check their admiration for the history embalmed in the buildings of Roussillon's capital, though its foundation only dated from the Dark Ages.

At Perpignan, also, there was an hôtel of the kind that did honour to France in those days, the type of hôtel that almost died during and after the Great War and under the reign of the char-à-banc motor. In the latter part of the ripened nineteenth century it was worth the approximate six hundred miles of railway from Calais merely to pass one night at this hôtel, an experience far more enlivening and exhilarating than a stay at a royal palace.

Their letters were in the Poste Restante, and as they had only been in telegraphic communication for a month since they left Pau, there was enough for them to read and ponder over, laugh at, purse lips of vexation at, cordially agree with, pishingly dissent from for twenty-four hours. At the end of two days, however, Mme. de Lamelle had got into communication with Gaston Dudeffrand at the southern series of his company's plantations, in the valley of the Tet between Olette and Prades. She arranged that he should meet them the following day at Prades, that they should sleep the night at his new Curator's house and afterwards drive on through enchanting scenery, over mountain roads to Axe, on the cascaded Ariège; whence by rail they might regain Toulouse and Pau.

Pending this last act of their programme, she carefully read through all her letters.

One of them, some ten days old, was from Bella Harmon, who had written it at Chacely. It ran thus:

Dearest Sophie,

Pursuant to your directions I am imagining you at the end of your Spanish trip and arriving at Perpignan. All the places are merely names to me. I tell John, now that Mervyn is back—which is the main reason of my writing to you—I ought really to do a little travelling and come out and see the great development of our Pyrenees stations. Of course it is now a separate company, and a French company; still there is something like a hundred thousand pounds of John's money in it, he and you and Mervyn really brought the whole of this Pyrenees business into existence, and John's firm in London will sell such a large proportion of its products. And Mervyn is John's representative in the French firm. I mean we ought not to forget that John and you really brought all this wonderful business in the Pyrenees into existence, though it is now being further developed by Frenchmen, the leading one of whom is married to poor old Veneering's daughter, Mervyn's sister. I only recount all this because the French are becoming *so ungrateful,* all over Egypt and over their silly enthusiasm for Russia, who will *never* help them—really.

Mervyn, as I mentioned — is back. But *oh,* so changed! Of course it is partly the fatigue of travel, bad food—I dare say; but most of all, his unquenchable sorrow over Hetty's death. His child is a lovely little creature, so like what Hetty was at her age that the sight of her almost gives me the illusion that I am back again in the middle 'sixties, beginning married life with little Hetty on my lap. It is the more illusive

since in our agony of grief we called her Hetty—Henrietta.

Mervyn cannot now be much more than twenty-eight, but when he arrived here from Southampton the other day he looked *thirty-eight*—very thin and with rather prominent cheek-bones. However, he seems fairly bright, and was enormously taken with his lovely child.

He seemed to realise very soon how much the child has owed to Elizabeth's love and care. It really looks upon her as its mother. I couldn't help thinking, as I saw the three of them, the child between Mervyn and my sweet Elizabeth (who after all is like a darker, graver Hetty), how *idiotic* are our stupid marriage laws, how *right* and *proper* it should be for Mervyn and Elizabeth to marry and bring up Hetty's child; and even of how such a thought must shape itself in darling Hetty's mind, wherever she is. But I suppose I should not say such things, even to you, in a letter I *know* you will keep to yourself.

In thinking of that I also thought what *miracles* Time can work! How foolishly and bitterly I used to think and even speak about you nearly thirty years ago, when I thought you were coming between me and John . . . Do you remember? I believe even in those days you asked me to call you "Sophronia," which I did very unwillingly. (How came you to have such an awful name?) But now, in much later life, how gladly I call you "My dearest Sophie."

I hope Georgy Podsnap has enjoyed her Pyrenean tour, or rather her Spanish trip, since I suppose the Spanish railways do not go very close up to the Pyrenees. Be sure you come and see us some time this summer or early autumn, if only to greet your much loved Mervyn.

Ever, my dearest, Sophie, Your affectionate

BELLA HARMON.

Mme. de Lamelle, who was nearly seventy, and a hardened cynic, felt her eyelids smarting with moisture as she folded up this letter and put it away, to be answered when they were once more settled down at their villa outside Pau.

CHAPTER XVI

MERVYN IN 1892

MIRIAM CLEMENTS—in reality Mary Wellings—had been away in America a good deal since the spring of 1889, acting all over the States with an English company, diverging into Canada in the summer and visiting the Bahamas, Jamaica, and even Trinidad in the winter; so that she considered herself quite a travelled person. Her most successful tour had, in reality, been partly organised and financed at the time by Victor Cochrane, who, through various successful ventures, had become quite a wealthy man, and almost a power in the States and Canada by his influence in the Press. Soon after Miriam's *début* at New York, in May, 1889, he wrote to her offering to furnish conclusive evidence that his wife had died three years before at an asylum near Montreal. Miriam did not answer the letter, but she took steps discreetly to verify the statement.

In June, 1889, at Chicago, she saw him in the front row of the stalls, had a passing tremor after the eye-glance, but pulled herself together and acted with unusual brilliancy, so that Chicago went mad about her.

At San Francisco, in the following October, Victor was taking a prominent part in a Committee of Reception. Miriam, with no sign of recognition, coldly shook hands with him. The following day he wrote to her and sent the letter with an unusually choice collection of hothouse flowers.

She replied with curtness, informing him that she

was forty-one, and as she was desirous to forget the past she did not wish to be reminded of it. He replied that he was forty-eight, though unusually sound and well for middle age; not willing to forget the past till he had made full amends for it; tout savoir serait tout pardonner; he certainly would not press his attentions or without her permission refer again to his ardent desire to be legitimately reunited to her. As an excuse, even for the slight re-entry into her path of life, he would like to inform her that her tour through the States, which was proving such a splendid success, was in reality of his arrangement and promotion. Although, for the reasons of which she was aware, he had had to leave her many years ago (on discovering that his wife in Canada was not dead), he had never ceased in his successful life to take an interest in her affairs. He had put money into the enterprises of Messrs. Ratti and Josué, and in various other ways had discreetly shepherded her great career as actress and manageress. He now did all that remained to him to do to make amends; but his attentions in that direction should not be pressed. All he asked was that, being in reality the principal financier behind her American tour, he might openly associate himself with her successes and appear in public as the principal organiser of her company's presentation of English comedies in America.

To this proposition, as a business arrangement, she consented. Victor did not abuse the concession. So much comfort and restfulness in her journeys, rehearsals, and new experiences ensued, so much prosperity resulted, that she grew to rely on him more and more, and they each proposed marriage, one to the other, after the successes at Toronto and New York in the autumn of 1890.

They were married with some quiet splendour at Grace Church, New York; Victor Cochrane, widower,

to Mary Wellings, spinster; and the British Consul General was present at the wedding. Mary Wellings —or, if you prefer the stage name, Miriam Clements— had amassed about thirty thousand pounds, which was very securely tied up. Victor Cochrane alleged, probably with truth, that he had a hundred thousand pounds. At any rate, he settled ten thousand on his wife, who had decided, on her marriage, to retire from the stage. The couple made a leisurely honeymoon tour through Florida to the West Indies, and returned to England in the spring of 1891, preceding Mervyn by a month.

Mervyn and Miriam did not meet till the June of that year; but after they had done so, Miriam—Victor Cochrane had insisted on the retention in private life of her Syriac name—confided to Bella Harmon that she found the young man sadly changed. The eager boyishness, the winsome good looks had left him. The face looked harder and leaner, the cheek-bones were more prominent, the moustache was more bristly, the eyes sometimes seemed dulled by some inward reverie. The manner, too, had a trace of absent-mindedness. It was too touching to be "charming" to see him with his child at Chacely.

It was perhaps equally sad to see him with Elizabeth —the hunger for affection in his eyes, the uplifting of his senses at the first moment of her speaking, for the voice, like the smile, was so strongly reminiscent of the vanished Hetty. Miriam, on her short wedding visit to Mrs. Harmon, felt with her that it was actually cruel that his country's laws should forbid Mervyn the one solace open to him—marriage with Elizabeth Harmon.

But there it was; and realising the drift of his feelings and instinctively the reciprocity in Elizabeth, Mervyn resolved to come as little to Chacely as possible till years had gone by and he had become indifferent to the accents, the eye-glances, the laughter, the smile that

recalled his dead wife. Perhaps he should have stayed longer in America, stayed longer with the Cornesses or with the kindly old *roué,* Crabtree. Or spent more months in Nicaragua, in Honduras.

"I am wretched, purely wretched," he exclaimed one day to John Harmon, in Mincing Lane. "I hate the City with its sickening, all-day roar of traffic—the restricted space here, the stuffy old drugs in bottles and jars, George Sampson's stupid face, his impudent son, Fletcher, and *his* vulgar cocksureness. He imitates my old manner—my manner of eye-flashing enthusiasm before I was married—till I'm sick of it. Madison, I can't quarrel with, because he only looks sad when I lose my temper. What *am* I to do? There's nothing more to invent in medicine just now. Our sugar-coated quinine pellets are perfect. We've handed over our Pyrenees experiments to Gaston's company——"

"Yes," said Harmon; "but I got you nominated our director on their board. Gaston's a splendid chap, honest and enthusiastic. Your sister has had a succession of babies, and cannot do much else. I rather got a hint from Sophie de Lamelle the other day that, despite their vigour in the Pyrenees over the old and the new plantations, they were a little reckless about some of their experiments. Remember, we've got a hundred thousand pounds in that business, possibly more. . . . Go over there as soon as it gets a little less hot, quietly inspect everything. Don't make up your mind too quickly, or speak without easily offered proof of your remarks. But *work* with Gaston. They can easily put you up. Work there till the spring. Satisfy yourself and me that everything is going on all right in these Pyrenean gardens. I set enormous store by them. . . . I think there are very few drugs we cannot grow there. I don't care if the bally country *is* French, and if we work it by an absolutely French company; so long as it gives our British pharmacopœia the materials it wants

for us to make up. . . . Gaston's wife is your sister, and she has seemed to me an absolutely sweet and honest creature . . . and I don't believe her husband has a grain of falseness in him. His French directors leave everything to him. Go and work with him for six months. After all, your mother lives at Pau now, and will make a sort of home for you there——"

"Yes," said Mervyn, with some bitterness, "and she's got living with her, on and off, that sweep of a brother of mine, Lancelot——"

"Well: go and oust Lancelot's influence. After all, she *is* your mother—and Jeanne's—and if you never go near her—Jeanne, with her babies, and you grizzling here—you can't wonder that she concentrates on the priest brother. Go and see her. Stay with her. Work with Gaston. You are in your right as our director-representative. Six months of you there may pull everything round quite right. As to your little Hetty, she can go on staying with her grandmother—dear little soul! It has been a renewal of our youth having her. She can go on staying indefinitely with us till you have made a settled home once more. . . . You'll marry again some day."

"Not unless I can marry Elizabeth."

"Well, don't worry—perhaps the Act will pass this session. It's one of the few things that keep me in Parliament . . . it is such a rotten show otherwise. When it passes you can come home and marry her, if she's agreeable. I see they're moving strongly in the matter in South Africa—going to make it legal—deceased wife's sister, I mean—in the South African colonies. Rhodes is strongly in favour of it, and he's become Premier at the Cape."

"Jove! is that so? I *am* glad. Why, if the thing breaks down in England we might go out to the Cape and be married there. I tell you, father, I shan't be

happy till Elizabeth and I are married; it is the only way to provide a settled home for Hettykins."

"That may be. But, for Elizabeth's sake, you mustn't be precipitate. Go and spend the winter with Gaston and Jeanne, and satisfy yourself the Pyrenees plantations are going to play a decisive part in our business. . . . Remember, we can do much in the way of *experiments* at Chacely, at Kew; but the few extra degrees of warmth in the Gave d'Aspe and in the Prades district are *invaluable*. We have far more space, different soils, *there*. We ought to be able, in south-west France, to grow nearly all the drugs we require for our European business, except a few tropical, equatorial things which we must try to cultivate in India, or in Central America——"

So Mervyn departed for the Pyrenees at the end of September, 1891. He first of all visited his mother in the Rue Henri Quatre, at Pau. It was a house he disliked, probably built in the second half of the eighteenth century, unmodern in all that concerned sanitation, smelly—richly so in certain rooms, with a not altogether disagreeably blended odour of scented woods and cooking—too heavily furnished with the large furniture of the Calais house, dark, and not entirely dissociated from the idea of fleas in certain rooms.

"I'm sorry you don't like our home," said his mother, a little peevishly. "The situation seemed to suit Lance, for various reasons; and Sophie gave us very little encouragement—I thought—to obtain a house near *her*, outside Pau; and although I should have liked to get a dwelling close to Jeanne, either at the Gave d'Aspe or even six or seven miles away, at Oloron, we could find *nothing*. Of course, Jeanne could have put me up at the Pépinière, at any rate for a time, while Gaston is so much away; but she was quite opposed—not very *kindly* opposed, I might say—to finding room for poor Lance. Besides, Lance has some

very important work on hand—clerical journalism. He has put money into a Pau newspaper, a clerical organ, and is really a sort of sub-editor. Later on he will, no doubt, get some Church appointment in his sacred calling. But just now he is acting as sub-editor and is publishing anonymously some very important articles."

"I suppose," said Mervyn, "it is his own money he has put into the newspaper?"

"Well—er—yes—and a—little I lent him. He seems so eager about the work and so confident it is going to get him on."

"Well, now, mother, a stop must be put to this, it really *must*. I don't mind how much you leave to Lance when you die: *I* don't ask for anything, but I think you ought to leave something to Jeanne—that she and Lance should share what you have, though I'm sure I hope they may have long to wait for it. But I happen, in spite of going and being away so much, to know a good deal about what Lance and other French 'clericals' are up to. It isn't religion, real, simple-minded Christian religion, they care two straws about. Look at this paper here"—and he took up a copy of *Les Poumons*—"who could call this really religious? Filthy jokes, nasty innuendoes, furious attacks on Protestantism, and frantic appeals to the people to upset the present Government."

"Yes, but Lance says——"

"I dare say he does—says all sorts of misleading things, or he wouldn't leave this paper about in your sitting-room. But this I am determined on, by any means in my power, *your* money that you have worked so hard to earn, is *not* going to be wasted on religious plots and Catholic crusades in France. You have got about eight hundred pounds a year. Lance, I suppose, has got nothing, as he is doing no regular clergy work?"

"He gets a salary—about three thousand francs a year, I think it is — from his paper, *L'Avenir des Pyrénées.*"

"I expect he made you invest some of your money in the wretched concern before they agreed to give him that?"

(Silence.)

"I see I'm right," continued Mervyn, as he saw his mother look away towards the much-shrouded window and avoid answering. . . . She suddenly appeared to him old and a little feeble, though her age was not yet sixty. She was crying—the slow tears of old age. Mervyn felt an immense compunction. In the few seconds of silence that followed he rapidly passed in review his life since he was eighteen, and the very small proportion of his time and interest given up to his mother. She had long seemed silly in his eyes—very Early Victorian—the phrase which was coming into vogue. Jeanne and he, since they were children, had had their little jokes about her. While their father had gradually become a dark horse, whose divagations they had not even wished to investigate, lest they led to scandals, their mother had been thoroughly respected for keeping the home together, for her financial probity and eminent respectability: but they had seldom consulted her much about their own aspirations and ambitions. So she had been thrown, more and more, into the society of her youngest child, this Lancelot, whom they both disliked.

He entered the room at this very moment, while the silence lasted, and Mervyn reviewed in thought his relations with his mother. Lancelot was a well-grown young man of about five feet ten, so that he looked tall for a French priest. He had a shaven face, already seeming a little blue on the cheeks and chin, eyes that were brown-grey in the pupil, like Mervyn's, but with an indefinable furtiveness, well-grown eyebrows, a

straight nose, rather full lips, and a rounded, in-curved chin. You would have felt that his face had all the materials in it for good looks, yet that he was not "nice-looking" owing to something in his expression —an angry look about the eyebrows which jarred with the slightly sensual lips and jaw well-modelled for mastication. His black clothes indicated the priest, yet were cut with a care which bordered on foppishness, and his large handkerchief was obviously scented. Mervyn's instinctive thought—he had not seen his brother for five or six years—was "He does not look a gentleman."

Lancelot glanced first at his mother: she had obviously been crying. Then he faced his brother.

"Te voilà, enfin! Si ma mère ne m'avait pas averti, je ne t'aurais guère reconnu——"

"Oh, *don't* be ridiculous, my dear boy, and stagey. We are English, after all, in origin, and when we are alone mig' . peak our own language."

"You may have remained or become English," said Lancelot, speaking pedantically, "but mother and I are French subjects. I was born in France and have never been in England, probably shall never go there. Our family is Flemish—Van Eering—which is how I have spelt my name since I became a student, and how mother spells her name since my father died. We descend, I have found out, from the Van Eerings of Ypres—almost French——"

"Very possibly," replied Mervyn; "all the British population descends from some Continental stock or other. I have not the slightest objection to you and mother calling yourselves French subjects, or Jeanne having become one since she married; but English was mother's and father's language, and mother still speaks French like a foreigner." (Mrs. Veneering, or, as she was now styled, Mme. Van Eering, had already glided out of the room to see that the *déjeuner*-lunch

was worthy of her household and her new nationality.) "We might at any rate speak English when we are by ourselves, if only for her sake; for her French accent is rather ridiculous—makes me laugh, to be frank; and I don't want to have any occasion or excuse for laughing at any one I respect so much."

Lance returned no definite reply, but answered to his brother's English interrogations in that language, though lavishing French on his mother in their side talks. Mme. Van Eering's side replies to her French son seemed to Mervyn, though her French was fluent, so bordering on the funny, so stagey, that he had difficulty in keeping a grave countenance, but he thought it better to bide his time and opportunity for pressing this point. . . . And *did* it matter? He himself, despite his departure from France, in 1880, to work elsewhere, still spoke French like a Frenchman. Sixteen years of youth in France had confirmed that gift.

Mme. Van Eering recovered her spirits during the eating of the *déjeuner*. She had become a good housewife in the course of twenty-eight years of French life, and it gratified her to see how the *menu* was appreciated by her two sons. The good meal, moreover, had made Mervyn more amiable, more disposed to deal considerately with his brother, as well as determined to get his mother safely placed, her rest and peace of mind secured, her hardly-earned and saved money secured to her.

After the *déjeuner* had been cleared away, it was now past one, on a very sultry day—the end of September. They took coffee in a rather measly, *vermoulu* little garden, not much larger than a court, though not without elements of the picturesque. Behind the roofs of houses, ancient rather than modern, and hints of an unseen railway and passing trains below a precipitous cliff, there was the glint of a river and the panorama of

the Pyrenees, a faintly blue sierra against the western sky.

Coffee and cigarettes, and a little contemplative silence increased the pacification commenced by a perfectly cooked *vol-au-vent* and some morsels of beefsteak done with mushrooms. From the too creeper-clad garden there was an adjournment to the *salon,* with its sun-blinds down and out, its windows open, and the slight, cheery noises of the ancient street passing across the room to its blind-shielded windows on the garden side.

Mervyn, only three days out from England, felt the charm of France—the most seductive of all countries—stealing over him. The chair in which he was seated was monstrously ugly and very uncomfortable, the cooking smell still permeating the house was too rich and strong for a satisfied appetite: but he said, chiefly to his frowning priest-brother:

"Now, look here! I'm not going to rest or to leave Pau—at any rate for long—till I've settled mother's affairs—*settled 'em*—so that her capital is placed in the fullest security and her annual income is sufficient for her needs as an elderly lady living in comfort. Her minimum income—which I am afraid is only eight hundred a year—don't interrupt, or I shall put you out of the room and go on talking with mother!" he exclaimed, impatient at any chance of a protest or interruption from Lancelot. "Mother! Listen! We must call your *notaire,* your *homme d'affaires* into this discussion. If you haven't got one here, we'll ask Sophie de Lamelle's advice. She's such a good woman of business, she's sure long ago to have found a competent and trustworthy equivalent of an English solicitor. . . . Well, then, your funds, your capital, your securities, every mortal bit of property you've got, must be vested in—what shall we say?—three trustees—Gaston, your *homme d'affaires*, and me, or some one like me,

who isn't going to profit by your will. You must make a new will, if your old one does not play fair, and leave the bulk of your property equally divided between Jeanne—or Jeanne's children—and Lancelot; and the whole of your securities must be transferred to, handed over to your trustees, so that you can't dispose of the least of them. The annual interest on these securities—say eight hundred a year—shall be yours to spend, and of this you may, as long as you like, give a hundred a year, to Lance. Not a penny more. So long as you live and this arrangement lasts, *I* will make Lance an allowance of a hundred pounds a year, until and unless he should receive from anywhere a salary of five hundred pounds or over. Thus, during your lifetime and so long as he plays fair he will be receiving two hundred pounds a year, unless in addition to that he makes more than five hundred pounds a year annually, when he will only receive your half of the allowance. At your death he will have half your property and Jeanne the other half.

"In addition to that, if you like his company and he doesn't get into Press trouble with the authorities, he can go on living with you and saving his board-and-lodging expenses. I don't mind his sub-editing or editing a newspaper or anything else, provided it isn't that beastly rag of the Abbé Loriot's—*La Démangeaison*—or whatever it's called—Oh, yes! I remember—*Les Poumons de la Loire*—It really ought to be *Les Poux-menteurs du Loriot.*"

"My *dear* Mervyn!" exclaimed his mother, rather languidly—she was really at the moment wondering what the butcher had been charging for the kilogramme of beefsteak—it had been admirably cooked, certainly. Still, Julie must not be extravagant.

Lancelot thought it more dignified to look away from his brother, contemptuously, into the narrow

glimpses of the shaded street. Mervyn dabbed his forehead a little with his handkerchief and continued:

"From what I remember of your affairs after father's death, you should have been in possession now of quite eight hundred pounds a year—twenty thousand francs. Yet you only seem to have something under eighteen thousand francs as an income. You must have already messed away two or three thousand pounds over Lance's crusades and political plotting—buying him a share in this Catholic paper, *L'Avenir des Pyrénées*, I suspect——"

"Well, and what if she did?" said Lance, turning on him angrily: "since I am sub-editor of the paper and get a salary from it?"

"Well, *if* you get a salary, why do you want her to make you an allowance, as I know you do? In any case, there is no guarantee that when this rotten religious excitement dies down your paper won't die with it. With the terms I am offering you so long as your paper lasts you can go on drawing the salary it gives you, in addition to mother's allowance and hospitality and to my hundred a year."

Lance turned his head away to the window; sulky, but calculating. An assured two hundred pounds—five thousand francs—a year, plus a comfortable home with a good *cuisine*, and brothership with a rich Englishman, as the French would repute Mervyn to be. In any case, if he objected, Mervyn would be too strong for him: for Jeanne and Gaston, the Lamelle woman, too, would side against him and would influence the local authorities. . . . Père Duparquet was dead. . . . He had no friends in the serving church, the church of the people; only among the Jesuits, the *Congrégations*. His clerical associates of the Press were at present "chiches aux paiements," meagre in their monetary rewards for services; and *not* to have quarrelled with

Mervyn, with a supposedly-rich English brother, would of itself be a strengthener of his position. . . . So he said, after a few seconds' silence:

"Oh, *have* it your own way! You seem to have silenced mother. As long as she is safe and comfortable I am prepared to rough it. I don't care *how* little *I* get! Fortunately my tastes are economical . . . and I want to be going back now to my office."

He whisked out of the *salon,* and presently they heard the front door close behind him and his steps on the pavement.

Mervyn's mother tacitly agreed to this arrangement of her affairs. She soon became, as the autumn days succeeded, placid, even happy, with her two sons; Lancelot immersed in his mysterious affairs and appearing only at the two principal meals, and Mervyn eager to make a better home of this over-furnished, stuffily accoutred, not too cleanly house. . . . Mervyn, of necessity, must know far more about finance than his younger brother. . . . It would be not merely comfortable, but—now she thought of it—positively blissful in her old age to have no terror about becoming poor. The three trustees would make things safe for her and her children. "Dear Mervyn!" she exclaimed to herself, as she went up to see that his bedroom was tidy and well aired and that the stain on the wall was quite covered by the wardrobe. "What a fine figure of a man he had grown! So like dear Papa, probably, when he first came to live at Blackheath." Perhaps now he was a widower he would reside near her in the Pyrenees and bring his little child there, whom she could take care of. At any rate——

In the course of a fortnight Mervyn had negotiated an arrangement by which the house in Rue Henri Quatre was leased to his mother at a rent equivalent to

eighty pounds a year, on the understanding that the sanitation and redecoration were attended to at her (his) expense. In the course of a month he had had w.c.'s of the most modern order installed outside each of the four floors, all the drainage properly attended to, different and more cleanly kitchen and scullery arrangements introduced. By Christmas time two new windows had been made, the garden had been revised, planted, and tidied, the excess of creeper subdued, but the beautiful high walls left, unspoilt in tone and their fruit trees pruned and honoured. Each room was drastically cleaned out and then its walls were redistempered and its woodwork restained and varnished. Some of the furniture was rearranged or remodelled, and the whole made less oppressive; some bits were sold, some new pieces were bought. Light was let in, ventilation improved, heavy hangings abolished, smells ruthlessly hunted down and despatched. Lancelot was allotted a bedroom and a sitting-room; his mother had her own bath-room, and a second one was constructed for the brothers and guests.

All these reforms were not properly finished till March, 1892. "I consider you have assured your mother at least ten years more of life—perhaps twenty," said Sophie de Lamelle, when all was done and she had come in one afternoon to take tea and inspect the repainted, repapered, almost reconstructed eighteenth-century house; its quaintness heightened, its atmosphere sweetened, its comfort doubled, and all its phantoms, odours, rats, mice, cockroaches, fleas, and earwigs dispelled.

Mervyn made No. 24, Rue Henri Quatre his headquarters from the autumn of 1891 to the autumn of 1892. But he left Pau in April, '92, on a fortnight's visit to England to see his child, to see Elizabeth, whom he had determined to marry, to see the Harmons and the Cornesses.

John Harmon's attempt, in 1891, to push through the House of Commons the amendment of the Marriage Laws sanctioning the marriage of a man with his deceased wife's sister, had failed. There seemed—owing to the upset of the General Election in 1892—no prospect of bringing the measure forward again in that year or for several years; on the other hand, Rhodes, now Premier of Cape Colony, was going to legalise this marriage in South Africa. Then—a little patience—and they could go out to the Cape and be married there; and Mervyn could, at the same time, study for his firm the extraordinary Cape flora, which now, and owing to Rhodes's influence, was being effectively protected and studied.

But before he could feel free for such a protracted absence, not only should his mother's affairs be happily settled for the rest of her life, and Lancelot simultaneously kept within bounds, but, most important of all, from the firm's point of view, Gaston's work in the Pyrenees must be conducted on assured lines. So, at different times between the autumn of 1891 and that of the following year, he visited the company's plantations between Prades on the south and the Gave d'Aspe on the north, conferring with Gaston and the six or seven French botanists and analytical chemists; with his sister; and with their ever faithful friend, Sophie de Lamelle; till it really seemed at last that the Société Droguiste des Pyrénées—whether "anonymous" or not—was in a healthy condition, and able to keep the parent firm in Mincing Lane well supplied with material.

Then there remained the clearing up of Lance's affairs.

For this purpose he obtained, through Gaston, an introduction to the bishop of the diocese which included Pau. Then—in the late autumn of 1892—a journey to the old, old town where lay the bishop's

palace—near the sea—the town that was Christian by the fourth century, the Lapurdum of the Romans, scarred with the history of nineteen hundred years, threatened, insulted once or twice by the Saracens, occupied by the English seven hundred and one hundred years ago.

He had made certain of an appointment by writing beforehand; for in his present phase of thought he was unhappy and restless if he had to wait or was baulked of action. The Episcopal palace was of great ancientry, almost suggesting a continued use from Roman times; it was also very dusty. The reception rooms were very lofty, the drapery, the dull-coloured furniture might stretch back to the Middle Ages.

The bishop, as Mervyn entered, put down a letter he was reading—Gaston's, he could see from the handwriting—rose and extended a hand. Mervyn did not drop lightly on one knee and kiss the episcopal ring; he respectfully pressed the hand and then sat down on the chair indicated, murmuring a conversational prelude.

"Très content de vous voir, Monsieur! Vous n'êtes pas Français, à ce qu'il me semble, mais vous me venez bien recommandé—par—par—Monsieur Dudeffrand—oui, Monsieur Dudeffrand . . . the husband of a charming woman——"

"My sister——"

"Of course; your sister—one needs only to look at you to see that. A striking resemblance. . . . Well: Monsieur is an anomaly—an Englishman . . . it appears . . . and yet speaking French like a Frenchman born. But your sister is a Frenchwoman from the north?"

"No, Monseigneur . . . and yes! English in origin as I am—or farther back still, perhaps Flemish. But French by residence and marriage."

"Well! That is sufficient. Would that France, our dear country, had more citizenesses like Madame

Dudeffrand—généreuse de ses bébés! . . . But we are both busy men. I do not speak empty compliments, but because your family inspires me with a sentiment of interest. Now what can I do for you? Qui n'êtes pas, après tout, des nôtres. You are not Catholic? You are Protestant?"

Mervyn: "Not precisely anything, since I must reply truthfully, Monseigneur. . . . A puzzled man, who is trying humbly to prosecute botanical studies in the hope of discovering drugs to heal all our physical maladies, if not our mental ones. But I am not here to talk about myself, or to waste your time over my affairs. . . . It is about my younger brother I have come to see Your Greatness. This brother Lancelot was born in France, and since adolescence has become a French citizen, and is now a young priest. He was educated at Calais and Autun, and spells his name in the Flemish fashion—Van Eering. Here—and—here are particulars about him for reference. He is a priest without a cure . . . drifting—bien à mon regret—into politics—and . . . newspaper strife, and plottings against the powers that be."

The ecclesiastic looked a little disconcerted.

"Of course," continued Mervyn, "if he were not my younger brother and if my mother, who is likewise a Catholic, had more authority over him, it would be out of my place to interfere. Il tracerait son propre chemin. But—but—as I am leaving France for a while to return to England and perhaps to go elsewhere—and may be long away from the Pyrenees—bien que j'y aie des intérêts sérieux—it seemed to me that an appeal to your goodness of heart might secure Your Greatness's intervention and——"

"Give me the name and address of your brother, Monsieur, at Pau. C'est là que demeure Madame votre mère? Good. Leave these particulars with me. I will inquire into the case and see if we cannot find

some way of utilising your brother's services. I will at any rate *see* him."

And from that the conversation turned to other topics . . . the antiquities of the western Pyrenees, the Roman remains, the ancientry of the bishopric, the Moorish invasions, Monseigneur's own remembrances of Algeria, his interest in African botany, the scope of medicinal botany. Ah, how deeply interesting *that* was! *What* a work for France! Would not Monsieur Veneering do him the pleasure of breakfasting? "Alors, à tantôt! Des affaires d'Église, du diocèse à ranger. . . . À tantôt! Midi? *C'est ça.*"

CHAPTER XVII

MERVYN AND ELIZABETH

CANON MILVEY, it has been related in an earlier chapter (when he was about to perform the marriage ceremony over Mervyn and Hetty), was not only a kindly man, but had had a gradually broadened outlook on the world and its marvels and mysteries since he had been given, by John Harmon, the living of Chacely. He rode a tricycle, photographed, and wrote upon the pre-Norman features of Chacely Church, and was fast becoming an authority on the fungi—edible and non-edible—of Gloucestershire. But his broad-mindedness had its limits. Like nearly all the clergy of the Church of England in England at that period (though not in the "Colonies"), he was strongly opposed to the marriage by a widower of his deceased wife's sister.

Why this almost passionate feeling arose among the clergy of this Church in the first half of the nineteenth century, we may never know. And when its physical or psychological cause is laid bare to the next generation, our successors in thinking may be too uninterested in the dead controversy to listen to the explanation. But in the story here told it must be related that, although Canon Milvey should have been aware that his friend of thirty years' standing—John Harmon—was what was then opprobriously termed a Free Thinker, almost without a religious conviction of any kind, and only a Christian by his conduct and inherent kindliness—he preferred to ignore this liberty of

thought, provided he did not come into open conflict with the Church. There were in those days very few points on which you could stand out in such an invidious position, but this was one; and Milvey having, since Mervyn's return from France, suddenly become aware of his intense desire to wed Elizabeth, his deceased wife's sister, felt that at this point he must intervene earnestly with the patron of his living.

So on John Harmon's return from London to spend the Christmas holidays at Chacely, Milvey sought a morning interview, hoping to get the unpleasant duty over and done with and the nightmare dispelled before Chacely Priory filled up with its Christmas party and they proceeded to a wholesome jollity which had been absent from their meetings since Hetty's death.

Harmon had evidently guessed at the meaning of this request for a private talk, for he received the Canon in his private sitting-room, off the library, where all subjects might be discussed with any degree of emotion without the sounds penetrating indiscreetly to ears outside.

"Well, Milvey! What is the serious subject you want to see me about? It can't be mushrooms, after the recent frosts. I hope it's nothing wrong with the new church stove?"

"It's much worse—in a way, my dear friend. It's the most . . . the only painful thing that could come between us. . . . I won't expatiate. . . . Your time is always valuable. . . . I will come to the point, to the question which really agitates me. Is Mervyn intending to. . . . Well! he *can't* marry her—legally. But I mean, is he really. . . . Oh! hang it all—I mean—what does he intend doing about that dear girl Elizabeth? I hate having to speak on such a subject. I am much indebted to you, I love all your children so much—I—I——" (His emotion got the better of him.)

"Mervyn and Elizabeth are intending to get married," replied Harmon, putting himself into the revolving chair at the writing-table. "To get married as soon as may be. . . . But *do* sit down. That chair, if you like it. . . . And let us talk over this thing quietly and considerately. . . . Mervyn and Elizabeth are intending to marry, but as we failed last year to do away, in Parliament, with this monstrous prohibition of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. . . . *No,* don't interrupt me. You shall have your own say when I have finished. . . . This monstrous prohibition, which really only affects a few countries of Protestant Christianity, they—Mervyn and Lizzie—are going out with me to South Africa. In Cape Colony this marriage was legalised on December 6—three weeks ago. Cecil Rhodes was determined to get that done. He hasn't been over well, I hear—fall from his horse. Well, we're going out to the Cape in January or February, and after the necessary period of residence my daughter will marry my son-in-law. Now! Say your say and I won't interrupt!"

Canon Milvey: "Well, Harmon. We look at this question from different standpoints. I dare say scientific men may see no reason why a man should not marry his deceased wife's sister. They may argue that there is no blood relationship; consequently—I need not waste your time by going into that—it is the distinct prohibition against it in our Scriptures which has made our Church so determined to forbid such a union——"

Harmon: "Have you finished? I mean, I don't want to hurry you or flurry you. I've lots of time this morning—a preliminary rest before our Christmas visitors come. . . . Have a cigar? Or a pipe?"

Milvey: "No, thank you very much. I never smoke nowadays before lunch. . . . This has dreadfully

upset me. . . . I set such store by you and your friendship——"

Harmon: "I know you do, old chap. And I will do as little as I can to disturb that friendship. I'm not asking *you* to marry them, am I? But as I see no chance of our Bill passing for years, and feel such a delay would be cruel to Mer and Lizzie, I have consented to go out with them to the Cape and stay with them—or Lizzie with me—until they can get legally married according to Cape laws"—(smokes). "It's a big sacrifice, I'm making—of time. Firstly, I don't like leaving Bella for long, and although I'm very eager to see Cape Colony now, after—what is it? Thirty-two years?—going away with Mervyn means the departure for remote South Africa of the two most important members of our firm. But it is *everything* to me that my daughter and my son-in-law—and Hetty's child—should be happy. *Where* could this child find a sweeter stepmother than in Elizabeth? She will be able to go and live with them when they are back in England, and will grow up never realising she has lost her own mother. So far from being *opposed* to the deceased wife's sister business, I am so much in favour of it—now I've come to think of it—that I would actually subsidise it in the case of poor couples, give 'em a grant from the State to start the second marriage; especially if there were children by the first wife. From the children's point of view I am more in favour of it than of any other kind of second marriage—whether it was or whether it was not quite to the liking of the imaginary tribal god of a semi-savage desert tribe three thousand years ago. . . . Your Church must be advised by stark, staring madmen to have worked up all this agitation since—what was it?—1835?"

Milvey: "They were always opposed to it in reality, from the time they were a separate Church; only they

got no opportunity to enforce their—their—views on the State till the year you mention——"

Harmon (interrupting): ". . . when they struck some sort of a bargain with Parliament—'You make the marriage with a deceased wife's sister illegal and we'll give in—on some other point'—I forget what——"

Milvey: "It may be as you say. But the legislators *did* agree, did so frame the Act, and haven't undone their procedure——"

Harmon: "No, though they have been asked to undo it by a very considerable body of public opinion—how many times is it, since 1850? I've got notes somewhere in this drawer because I'm always hammering at the question—almost the only thing I speak about in the House now. Stop a bit. . . . Here they are. No. Not those; those are about fish manure. . . . Ah! *I've* got 'em." (Reads through a short manuscript.) "Since 1850. . . . There! you can see for yourself. . . . *Twenty-seven times;* and since 1879, the Princes all voting for it in the House of Lords and the Queen known to be in favour of it! *Twenty-seven times* have we debated the matter in one or other House since 1850. . . . But, my dear old chap! why should we go on discussing this and working ourselves up into anger? Your Church doggedly—and, as I think, insensately—opposes this reform in the United Kingdom. You must therefore follow suit. I quite understand. I'm not asking *you* to come out to the Cape—though I should be delighted if you and Mrs. Milvey did come—and marry this determined couple in Cape Town. I am only telling you as an old friend that they are going out with me to the Cape and that there, as soon as the local law permits, they will get married. . . . And afterwards I shall continue striving for all I'm worth to push in our home Parliament for making these marriages of men with their deceased's wife's

sister legal—retrospectively as well as actually. If you can even put a finger on a text in Exodus or Leviticus specifically forbidding such a union in plain words and after the death of the first wife, I would grant you the prohibition might carry some weight with a polygamous Jew; but even then I can't see why it need flutter monogamous Christians who have discarded such a mass of Jewish rubbish in religion. Don't forget *that!* If you're to revive these regulations for the harassing of Christians, revive at the same time the compensations the Jews enjoyed. Make polygamy legal. . . . But you can't even find this particular union definitely proscribed. You can only read in a hushed voice—forgive me for saying 'you' each time—I am thinking only of the typical upholder of this nonsense. Some such person can only quote in lowered tones—because of their impropriety—passages about discovering the nakedness of certain degrees of affinity. . . . And the same books of Exodus and Leviticus contain still more stringent pronouncements as to the colours the Deity desired for the curtains of his Tabernacle—what were they? Let's get a Bible and see."

(Takes down one from a shelf. Turns over its pages.)

"Here we are! 'Blue and purple and scarlet.' . . . And bowls made 'like unto almonds, with a knop and a flower in one branch.' . . . Why are all these provisos, these hundred ordinances about burnt offerings and bowls of blood set on one side and ignored, while a few vexatious passages regarding the polygamous marriages of the Israelites are treasured, positively treasured, by the Church of England because they may be enforced to hurt natural-minded men and women of the present day? *There!* I am giving you a hash of my House of Commons speeches! I believe Gladstone wrings his hands when I'm up and exclaims

'Blasphemy!' I've promoted Bills for the reform—or voted for 'em—*nine* times since 1880." (Pauses for breath.)

Milvey: "I know you have. Somehow it never worried me—theoretically, I mean, your doing so. I always knew we were not in agreement on all matters of religion, but——"

Harmon (interrupting, or rather continuing in thought): "If Mervyn and Hetty had not had a child—such a darling child, you know her well!—I would not be so eager that he should marry Elizabeth. But there it is! The child looks on Elizabeth as her mother——"

Milvey: "Is Hetty going out with you to South Africa——"

Harmon: "Of *course* not. She is only three years old. She will remain here in her grandmother's care till her father comes back and sets up house again on this side——"

Milvey: "Then, as they will probably be away several years. . . . However, argument and remonstrance on my part are *futile,* I can see! This thing grieves me as much as if it were the affair of my own children—I—I—I——"

Harmon: "*You. . . . You!* Dear old friend! I realise your position. You have made your protest, done your duty. Now dismiss it from your thoughts. . . . And let's have a quietly happy Christmas. We have had such sad ones since Hetty died. . . . Utter objurgations if you still feel it part of your Christian duty, but reserve them till I come back, till I inform you that the marriage *has* taken place. Why, we may all be shipwrecked, or stranded on a desert island, or the young people may quarrel on the way out, or Elizabeth may show, when she gets there, a preference for Cecil Rhodes——!"

* * * * *

Canon Milvey left the Priory feeling and looking sad; the sadder, perhaps, because he could not precisely remember the Church's arguments or the incriminating texts in the tiresome Pentateuch. In a way, he scarcely liked to admit to himself, he really *disliked* all the books of the Old Testament, prior to the Psalms. The four books of the Pentateuch, after the bold Arabian Nights stories of Genesis, were excessively tedious and contentious, indulged in many repetitions and much obscure Jacobean phraseology, and exhibited the Deity in a light that could only be called repulsive to an educated man of modern times—a sort of dematerialised, fussy, old sheikh with a barbaric love of jewels and gold and scented woods, burnt offerings and animal terror. . . . Nothing whatever like the Creator of a Universe of uncountable myriads of fixed stars and nebulæ, or even of the mere solar system. The disgusting repetitions of phrases about blood and fat and broiled meat. . . . How *could* the bishops?

But the bishops, he knew, would not budge an inch or yield an iota in the matter of marriage with a deceased wife's sister. Rome, it is true, compromised by making it merely the matter of granting a dispensation after a reasonable inquiry. . . . And yet earlier than that, the Roman bishops had promulgated such fantastic marriage laws that you daren't look in an amatory way on a third cousin.

But what had our English bishops done during all these years about children working in factories—working twelve hours out of the twenty-four? About little boys sweeping chimneys? When he had toiled in a large, poor parish in North-west London, John Harmon had helped him with money, with advice, with furtherance of his schemes. What had the bishops done in the House of Lords to make life tolerable and reasonably safe for the very poor? Nothing.

He confided all these doubts and difficulties to his

spouse on his return home. Mrs. Milvey was very much inclined to shrivel them up by caustic criticisms of the Anglican bishops, but did not. Her husband was tired, and for once looked his age. In the long run she decided him not to prejudge as criminals people who were only contemplating a crime, but to spend Christmas Day at the Priory as of yore. Mrs. Milvey was devoted to Elizabeth, and was also very favourably inclined towards Mervyn, and intensely fond of Hetty's child. Secretly she thought the projected marriage a most sensible one, even though it might entail a short exile and a little pretence of shockedness on her husband's part. The one point on which, however, she, once and for all, expressed herself with a decision that admitted no argument was her husband's ridiculous idea—which even he did not contemplate other than theoretically—that he should give up Chacely and apply to his bishop for some other cure of souls. . . . "He'd send us to the outskirts of Birmingham, if you did anything so very foolish and uncalled for; and we should both be dead in six months: influenza and heartbreak combined. Now change your boots, even after you've taken off the goloshes, and have a good warm at your study fire before you come in to lunch."

* * * * *

Among the house-party which stayed at Chacely Priory from Christmas Day to the New Year it was generally understood that Mervyn intended to marry Elizabeth in South Africa whilst her father stayed there; but that the ostensible and partly true motives of the two men making this journey were to inspect the peculiar and extraordinary flora of Cape Colony and conclude arrangements for the export of drug material.

This party of Christmas guests included Mervyn—if he could be called a "guest," and Helen under like conditions—who had exclaimed, arriving with her husband, "How *dare* you call me a 'guest,' when I'm a

daughter of the house! This is Elizabeth's doing!"—and Helen's husband, Madison Corness, and the wonderful eighteen-months'-old son, who was in every way a prodigy, but whom they had announced rather patronisingly "would be able to play with little Hetty"—under proper supervision. Hetty, when she heard this, was quite scornful about playing with "babies," owing to her own advanced age of three, and her constant intercourse with "grown-up people and gardeners," as she phrased it. Hetty had no nurse; and the possibility of a sad day coming when, in the absence of Elizabeth, she would have to accept the attentions of a hired guardian was kept from her knowledge. She consorted on quite equal terms with the world she had defined in those terms "grown-up people and gardeners," and although as a "little lady" she realised that something must be done for her eighteen-months'-old cousin, it must be something marked on her part by infinite condescension and no rough play.

The vicar and Mrs. Milvey, who came both to lunch and to dine, and to spend the evening on Christmas Day, would have felt hurt if they had been styled "guests," however the Canon may have fleetingly contemplated some awful act of renunciation if the shadow of the Deceased Wife's Sister fell over Chacely Priory. . . . "*How* you men are influenced by names, and *Latin* names!" Mrs. Milvey had said as they walked up from the church. "If you had only called it something else you wouldn't have minded half so much men marrying their dead wife's sister; but 'deceased' suggested 'diseased' in the minds of ignorant people. I expect the whole fuss is due to some whimsy of James the First—nasty, smelly, tipsy old thing!—or Elizabeth, and you can't uphold *her* moral sense. At least not in *my* hearing!"

Other persons expected at the Priory this Christmas

Day who would have equally repudiated the calling of "guests," were Lucy Milvey and her brother Ambrose. They both possessed sufficient independence of character and sense of being at home to walk up apart from their parents. Ambrose was a member of Harmon's staff at Mincing Lane, and had a great deal to do in these later days with the greenhouses at Chacely. Lucy was by now a mistress at a large girls' school near Birmingham, after having, during the final education of the three Harmon daughters, been a sort of half-assistant, half-pupil with them under the efficient Miss Mitcham. Miss Mitcham might have been with them that Christmas, by the bye, but Harmon's influence, joined with that of Kew, had obtained an important post for her in Australia. So that when you had passed all these affectionate hangers-on of Chacely in review, in addition to the hosts, John and Bella and their children and grandchildren, the only "guests," strictly speaking, were Miriam and Victor Cochrane.

Miriam, though a wealthy lady now, and just inclining, *ever* so slightly, to be stout—ever so slightly, really not to be noticed in a filmy evening costume; Miriam, who should—you would have thought—have been quite happy, now she was distinctly married, quite away from the stage and its drudgery, excitement, agitating hopes and exasperating disappointments; now that she was wealthy with assured wealth and much loved by a fine-looking husband—of middle age—Miriam, though she would never have confessed it, save perhaps in the library, alone with John Harmon, was not quite content with her lot. So far as she sounded her own discontent—all in admitting its unreasonableness—she fretted because she had no child. She was, I think, forty-three when she married, and she had told John Harmon, many years before, that her first union with Cochrane in a marriage she never

doubted to be legal (even though only performed at a Registry Office) had been followed by the birth of a child which had died a year later.

Was this "real" marriage to remain childless? That was ostensibly the problem which threw grains of fretfulness into her outlook on life—since she had nothing else to fret about. No one would have taken her for forty-four. . . . Very likely, if they did not look up records, they would have only guessed "thirty-two," for she certainly looked no older than when she had first met Mervyn. And as to Victor? Thirty-five, thirty-six might have been your guess, unless likewise you ferreted into details. This was very difficult in 1892, when there was no "Who's Who" in its present form.

Victor Cochrane, in an atmosphere like Chacely, wasn't quite a gentleman (it seemed to Miriam's fretful observance). His clothes were too good, a tiny little bit stagey: the frock coats too utterly "frock," and their turn-over collars and lappets too broad and too glossy; his waistcoats were too double-breasted, his country-going short jackets too short or too fuzzy. On the stage you might possibly have said—if you were a woman and in a box at some one else's expense —"How *perfectly* that man is dressed." The cheaper newspapers of the day, before he retired, always referred to Victor's "perfect tailoring."

But in private life and in the critical eyes of his wife or the unspoken thoughts of the men in the Harmon circle, he was too well dressed—with just a suggestion (which his age—nearly fifty—rebuked)—of being a tailor's dummy, so evidently the model from whom fashion plates were drawn.

Similarly, to his wife's fastidiousness, it seemed that his laugh was too loud, his teeth, shown in laughing,

evinced too much gold and too perfect a dentistry, his tie-pins were too large and too valuable, his shoes too often showed patent leather in their structure to be compatible with rough country walks and snow-slush.

But Miriam fortunately kept nine-tenths of this mental criticism to herself, and if she mentioned the remaining tenth in John Harmon's hearing he gave her no sympathy.

"For my part," he said, "I *like* a well-dressed man. My own shabbiness is due to increasing age and laziness. Let me see, your husband is barely fifty yet, and I am turned sixty-one. Victor teaches us all a lesson. We all ought to dress well. Mervyn's getting much too slack. I shall warn Elizabeth—whose own dress, by the bye, looks a bit dowdy. That child occupies all her time and thought. I hope you admired Bella's dress for Christmas Night? *Do* tell her so if you did. The darling tends to get a bit droopy in these days, with children dying and going away. That's one reason why I am insisting on our flight to the Cape—to see my old vineyards—that Hettikins shall be left behind for Bella to look after. . . . What do you think of Mervyn after twelve months of France?"

Miriam: "Well, if *I* don't look my age by ten years, as you are polite enough to say, Mervyn looks *his*—which I suppose to be thirty—*to the day.* I never saw any one grow old-looking so quickly. *Of course* I love him, shall always love him, with remembrance of his influence on my life. . . . But he isn't nearly as good-looking as he was, four years, five years ago. Then my head or my heart reeled if I contemplated him too long, even though his thoughts of me were never other than filial. But I can't imagine his being easily fallen-in-love with now, except for his botany—I suppose Elizabeth is mad on botany——?"

Harmon: "I don't know about 'mad'; but her

knowledge in that direction is very remarkable. If she hadn't been so taken up with that child since 1890, she might actually have finished and published and assisted to illustrate a monograph on the drug-yielding Asclepiads—at least, so she says, when I tease her. You know—seriously—it's a curious case. She's silently but almost passionately devoted to her sister's memory, has sworn a vow of hatred against Providence and the London doctors for her death; and yet is quite as completely in love with Mervyn and resolved to marry him and be a mother to Hetty. . . . Well! So much for her—and him—may they both be happy. If goodness and good looks, together, count for anything, they deserve to be. . . . And now about you—and Victor. Do you like the Isle of Wight?"

Miriam: "Ye-es. I suppose I do. As much as I should like any other home without a child in it. Why—*why*—why do I so long for children? Is it 'idiopathic'? A word I don't really know the meaning of, only I see it so much now in the Reviews which discuss morbid changes of mind. Victor is intensely fond of me—but 'am I too old to have a child?' is what I keep asking myself and longing to have answered. All these confessions must scare you. They must be due to this room. I remember it was here ten years—no, eleven years—ago, also somewhere about Christmas time—that I suddenly told you all about myself and my early marriage—which I found out wasn't a marriage—to Victor—and the little child that died. . . . Well, I've made myself respectable, dear friend—which, in reality, I always have been; and I suppose, compared with many women on the stage, I ought to count myself very lucky—very lucky. Above all, in having made such friends as you and Bella. And Victor—how I hate the name—Victor is really a very good soul. I suppose you know he has completely retired from the theatrical world? . . . Is going in for

Parliament? An Isle of Wight constituency. Something or other Imperialist or Liberal Unionist. Money, of course; judiciously laid out. Wants to be knighted some day—not too long hence. . . . All *I* care about—you'll think me really quite morbid—is to have a child—a daughter. The one I told you about was a daughter. Then Victor can do as he likes. I think he's quite straight. And one way and another, I've got about forty thousand pounds—my own and his. You know I really did very well out of the stage. Not many actresses have retired with so much as that when they were just past forty—I mean in true truth! Of course they often pretend they've got lots more, poor things. . . . Oh—and my people? It's been quite *comic!* You know my father's a bishop? He accepted the bishopric of Ballarat, nine years ago, and went out with the old harridan he's married. She had more than three thousand a year—*and* influence. And now, after interminable pleadings and plaguings he thinks he's going to get a home bishopric. Wouldn't even mind Sodor and Man, because he can't stand the Australian summers. Not that he has done badly in Australia. He's always kept himself under the limelight and in the newspapers, and the Australians have rather liked his goings-on and his catch-phrases. . . . As soon as he—and she—heard I'd married Victor, and that Victor was so well off—and *I* hadn't done badly out of twenty years on the boards, he wrote *such* gushing letters—and persuaded her to write too! She signed herself 'Yours affectionately.' But I never replied. I don't care enough about them to hate them."

Harmon: "Well, that's all right! I should certainly leave them alone till you see his English bishopric gazetted—or whatever they do about bishops' appointments. 'Lark if they gave him Worcester! Then we should ask him and her over here. . . . Have *you* down at the same time. . . . But, Miriam, don't

you get down-hearted. You're only at the beginning of the forties. Only through—and very happily through—the first, the *strenuous* part of your life. In the second half of one's life, I can tell you, one year counts as two. I hope your husband will get into Parliament, and whilst I'm there. I always like 'Colonials' to get in. They're generally on the wrong side at first, and are easily bamboozled with attentions and titles and orders. But they're difficult folk in the long run to deceive, and p'raps, when there are more of them in, they may make the wrong side right. The right side certainly seems to me going wrong—in many ways. Now I hear faint echoes of voices that suggest tea. Let's go and have some. *Always* 'yours to command,' you know!"

This little party of intelligent people at Chacely Priory were really sitting and talking, eating and walking, thinking and sighing, smiling and crying—for Bella still shed tears over the memory of irreplaceable Hetty, and over long-absent and estranged Reggie—at the close of the nineteenth century, and nearer its close than the almanac told them. For the beginning of the New Age might really be dated two years from their Christmas party, when the safety bicycle suddenly became a necessity of universal adoption, and with its pneumatic tubes led to the motor carriage, the motor lorry, the aircraft heavier-than-air; and a vastly extended mastery over mineral oil, innumerable acids, unheard-of minerals; some of them, like radium, the materialising of a Divine force.

These characters in my story were playing about, fretting, laughing, flirting, speculating; wistfully aware, most of them, that great happenings threatened below the horizon, heralded by an explicable glow of dawn eight years before the century formally closed with the death of Victoria. Politics in 1892-1893

were muddled by the return to power of a dying Gladstone, eager for an Irish reconciliation which Fate would postpone and postpone ironically; a Gladstone, born too early to appreciate the *rôle* of science and true learning, and the unimportance of religious speculations framed by men who knew nothing of telescopes or of the earth's relations with the solar system. Labour was too ignorant to govern. Gentility, more or less badly educated, clothed as either Liberal or Conservative, Philosophic Radical or Irish Home Ruler, swayed opinion in the kingdom and the Empire. People—all but a few eccentrics of the middle class on solid-tyred bicycles of disproportionate wheels, or in unmanageable, hazardous balloons—still went their ways on foot or on horseback, in vehicles drawn by horses or in trains behind steam-engines. Women who respected themselves and the opinions of their male relations never alluded to the possibility of their wanting or having or placing a vote. Their costume, it is true, at the close of 1892 showed an approach to reason and simplicity, better than in the false dawn of 1867; a relief from the insane bulging, excessive weight, and expensive fal-bal-las of the middle 'eighties, or the swaddled clothing from head to heels of the later 'seventies. Women in their dress—as may be seen in Du Maurier's drawings—had entered on a charming period of sanity and grace.

Only thirty years ago; and some of the people I have dealt with are still living (thanks to Harmon, Veneering's wonderful discoveries in drugs), still hoping, despite the War and its effects, still smiling bravely at the unfolded future; still confident as to the marvellous prospects of the human race. . . .

The talk of John Harmon, of Mervyn even, of happy confident Madison Corness, of ambitious Victor Cochrane, and of dear Elizabeth—all aglow with the thought that the coming year solved *her* problem of

marriage and motherhood—dispelled the doubts of the sad and tremulous, cynical and anxious members of the little party, which sat up till midnight on December 31, 1892, to see the New Year in. The vicar and his wife sat with them, silent; it may be, praying; and the vicar hoping that marriage with a deceased wife's sister would not shatter the fabric of the Established Church.

CHAPTER XVIII

IN SOUTH AFRICA

AND this is Cape Town, after thirty-three years!" said John Harmon, one morning in February, 1893.

It was still early, between seven and eight; he and Mervyn had risen in good time because they knew their steamer had entered Table Bay and was cautiously approaching the wharf along the breakwater. Soon Elizabeth would be by their side, and they would be leaving the ship for some hotel. Harmon stared pensively at the splendid prospect. No mountain range anywhere looks to such advantage in conjunction with an outspread town as Table Mountain to the south of Cape Town. Its height might be guessed by an enthusiast in landscapes at five thousand feet, nothing less, though in reality its highest point is not much over three thousand, five hundred feet. It is normally a great blue wall behind a splendid spread of pinkish-white, yellow-white buildings, through which meanders a broad stream of dark green trees marking public gardens, road-side avenues, and squares, while, in addition, a date palm here a date palm there gives the reminiscent touch of Africa. I doubt whether there is any city in the British Empire with the beauty and majesty of Cape Town, as seen from the harbour.

So must have thought Harmon as he gazed on it in the second month of 1893, so marvellously had it changed from the restricted little Dutch town he had left in 1860. Then the eye must have rested mainly

on the long blue wall of the mountains, from the Devil's Peak on the east to the Lion's Head and Rump on the west; and the capital of South Africa in those days must have been limited to a compact little Dutch town of flat-roofed houses, and a castle of the early eighteenth century near the shore. Now it was a far-spreading metropolis stretching several miles into the background till its white houses splashed the base and even the ramparts of Table Mountain.

They found their way, half in a dream, perhaps in a carriage—they never could remember—but escorted by an hotel porter of mixed race to what was then deemed the "best" hotel, somewhere in Adderley Street: rather a soup-smelling, outwardly white-and-green, inwardly small-roomed, stuffily furnished hostelry, nearly as old in name, if not in building, as the 1806 occupation.

To Harmon, in 1860, it would have seemed too smart to enter; now, after so many years of life at its highest level, in England and France, he rather shrank from its Oriental dinner smell and its overcrowded furniture. However——

A distinctly good breakfast restored cheerfulness. Being a man of action and ascertaining that His Excellency was in town and likely to be at home, Harmon decided to proceed to Government House, present his letters of credence, and see the Governor, if he was visible.

He drove to Government House, his eyes feasting on the real distinction, even then, the beauty, one might have said of the great city, so curiously large and widespread if you glanced at the modest totality in figures of its very diverse population. Samples of this he saw from his carriage windows: white, red-cheeked men of northern European stock; white, but sun-tanned, fair-haired Afrikanders; yellow-skinned, black-haired nondescripts—"Cape Boys"—some

nearly white enough to be called "Europeans," others bordering on the Asiatic or the Hottentot. As to genuine Asiatics, there were Malays, dressed half in Oriental half in European style; Indians—wholly Indian in costume, much hairier and better-featured than the Malays; negroes of all types and all grades of costume, except that there was little nudity; negro half-castes smartly attired; and English soldiers in scarlet uniform, looking almost aggressively English.

But the drive to Government House did not take long, and with little delay Harmon found himself in a spacious library, looking on to a lovely garden, with the Governor sitting—more or less—at his massive writing-table, and himself in an armchair facing the Governor.

"My dear Mr. Harmon, of course I remember you, perfectly; heard you speak once or twice in the House. . . . And what gives us the pleasure of seeing you here? I had no idea you contemplated a visit to South Africa, and during the time our home Parliament is sitting."

"As to that," Harmon replied, "an elderly man like myself must have an occasional holiday, and I have, of course, arranged for a 'pair.' I don't think the Ministry is menaced before I can get back. And even if they are, I don't know that I care very deeply. We are all at sixes-and-sevens over our politics at home, and although my party is 'in,' it is on a very insecure tenure, and the bulk of us only sympathise with poor old Gladstone in theory and not in practice; we are in a transitional state of mind. . . . But I don't—can't—intend to be away for very long: my business—the drug business, I mean—won't let me. Unfortunately, there are other complications."

And here he told the Governor as briefly as possible the story of Mervyn and Elizabeth.

"I had an idea," he resumed, "that marriage with

a deceased wife's sister was now legal at the Cape of Good Hope; we have come out here in that hope; and as soon as it can be settled and I have seen them married, I shall turn about and go home as quickly as a steamer can take me. But that is not my only object in coming out to the Cape—if I may tell you now, and am not too hideously wasting your morning?"

"You're not wasting my morning, for your affairs interest me. But supposing I suggest this: That as I have things I must attend to now with my private secretary—ah, here he is. . . . Ready in a moment, Breasted—you should return here to lunch—half-past one—and that after lunch we should go into all the matters that interest *you?* Let me see, what are they?"

"Well," replied Harmon, "there is this marriage business, Veneering and my daughter; and whilst that is being arranged for, I want to go up country a considerable distance and see if I cannot meet my eldest son, Captain Reggie Harmon, who was your A.D.C."

The Governor: "*Of course,* Reggie. *Now* I know why your face and voice and name seemed so familiar to me!"

Harmon: "I did write to him last Christmas, but I thought I would let him have a telegram now, if the line functions. . . . I dare say I could go to the company's office in this town and find out where he is?"

"Precisely. Well, then, you do all that and come back to lunch; then I will drive you out somewhere and we can talk all these things over quietly."

It was now twelve, so Harmon drove to the Cape Town office of the Chartered Company. After a short wait, the Secretary hurried in, shook hands effusively, and drew him into his own office, which was in a state of staggering untidiness.

He was a good-looking man, rather carelessly dressed, with merry eyes and yet conveying a curious

impression of conspiracy. Did he (Harmon wondered) go on like this with every caller, or was he engaged in half a dozen plots of which, as a special favour, he furnished Harmon with an outline? However, he professed to know all about Reggie and to be expressly delighted with Reggie's parent's having come to inquire after his son and the company's doings. Would the latter excuse him? He would just telephone to Mr. Rhodes, at Groote Schuur, and announce Mr. Harmon's arrival.

This was quickly done. Then ensued an interval in which they talked of nothing very important, while a sombre-looking person, faultlessly dressed, came in with papers to be signed. They were signed amid muttered, under-voiced explanations. "On the whole," resumed the Secretary. . . . Ting-ting-ting—went the telephone bell. "Ah, that is Mr. Rhodes, evidently." (To the telephone): "Yes . . . yes. . . . What did you say? Why, he's here, in my office. . . . Oh, I'll see, I'll ask him. . . . Mr. Harmon, Mr. Rhodes asks if you can come out and see him this afternoon?"

"Certainly. Will four o'clock be too early?"

"No, I'm sure it won't. I'll let him know. You're lunching with the Governor? Good-bye then, for the present."

Then back to the hotel, a slight change of costume, a different tie, and off again to Government House. The Governor's lady had met Mr. Harmon in London, of course (both adjust their memories), and they both know Suzanne Feenix, and if it were only as Reggie's father, he was welcome. Both the Governor and his wife believe Reggie is doing very well with the Chartered Company, though they were sorry to lose him.

"He's too ambitious, Mr. Harmon, if, indeed, one can say that of any young man. But he could never

have stayed very long with us, living mostly in a palace of this kind. . . . You see, my constitutional duties keep me tied a good deal to Cape Town."

After lunch, a victoria and a pair of horses conveyed the Governor and his guest to Groote Schuur, where Rhodes had taken up his residence. The Governor's wife had asked Mr. Harmon if he and his daughter would like to stay a few days with them at Cape Town, but nothing was said about Mervyn. Why? Probably only forgetfulness, but Harmon felt instinctively that it might be on account of the projected marriage—taking place, as it was likely to do, so soon after its legality had been established. It might, indeed, be the first under the new law. This, perhaps, made the situation a little strained. Then again, he had not much time to spare at Cape Town itself. Mervyn would reside there for the prescribed period before the marriage, and fulfil all other regulations. Elizabeth and her father would spend the last month of her single life together. They would visit the old haunts round Constantia, where he had once worked on the vineyards of kind old Jan or Johannes de Vries. Then, when Reggie had answered, telling them he could trek back to the railway terminus in time to meet them, they would make their way to wherever the northern railway stopped—Vrijburg, was it?—and see him there.

Harmon thought Lady Loch's attention wandered a little through his rather confused explanations. However, she accepted them pleasantly. And now her husband was saying good-bye to him at Groote Schuur, and an English butler, with a very superior air, was awaiting his intimation as to who he was, while the Governor was being driven away.

A few minutes afterwards he was looking at Rhodes in a handsomely-furnished study, with great window seats and views through the windows over a beautiful

garden. . . . Green turf in foreground, beds of blue lilies and enormous pink hydrangeas.

"I remembered the name at once" (Rhodes was saying). "Rather a peculiar one—seem to have read it in one of Dickens' novels." He moved from a writing-table to the window seats. "Have some tea? You come and sit here, by the window. Lovely view of Table Mountain, isn't it?" (To servant) "Tea, please. . . . Well: about your boy. He's been with us since 1890, I fancy. I've no idea where he is just now, but we've got the line—telegraph, I mean—nearly up to the Zambezi, so we can easily find out; and, of course, if things are going on pretty smoothly he shall have leave of absence enough to come and see you, especially if you're going half-way. To rail-end, I mean. What's your age? Sixty-two? Well, you don't look it, you don't look much older than *I* am, and I'm twenty years younger than that. All comes, I suppose, of the drug business! Found out some Water of Life, something to keep you eternally young. But what brings you out here? Not to see your son *only, I'll* bet."

"No," said Harmon. "That's not the only reason." Tea came in at this point, and he decided to reserve his confidences. The English butler and a Cape Boy footman spent a minute or two arranging the tea-things and the table of bread and butter, toast, cakes, and confitures, and then went out. Rhodes poured out the tea and waved a hand towards the eatables. He then said:

"Thought it wasn't, because your old Parliament at home is sitting just now. Well! What is it?"

"Fact is," said Harmon, deciding to give him all his confidence, "I've got another family problem to solve. You—and, I suspect, it *was* largely *you*—have legalised here the deceased wife's sister marriage; and for the

last ten years there's been such a passion for marrying —or trying to marry—your deceased wife's sisters that I expect the news of what your Parliament has done here will presently bring quite a number of young men and women out to the Cape. Well, we've come for that purpose. . . . In my firm is a very fine young fellow, Mervyn Veneering, son of the old Veneering who really started this drugs' manufacture on a new basis, modernised it, in fact. Not to make too long a story of it, his son, Mervyn, married my eldest daughter. She—poor thing—one of those sorrows you can never forget—died a week or so after her confinement —puerperal fever—and left a little daughter, happily still living. My second girl, Elizabeth, took charge of this child while its father travelled in Tropical America. After he came back the likeness between the two sisters was too much for him. He wanted to marry Elizabeth, and Elizabeth had fallen in love with him. I counselled the usual sort of delay and respites a well-meaning father would advise. . . . A year in France followed—Pyrenees, you know, where we had long since started herb cultivation grounds. . . . Thank you, I will have another cup. It's three weeks since I've drunk such tea. Why is it, on board ship. . . . However, I can talk about that afterwards. . . . Last year, in the autumn, I saw in the Press that you were going to bring in a Bill here to make this perfectly reasonable marriage legal; so, as Mervyn and Elizabeth were still obstinately determined to—to—well, to get married somewhere, somehow, or failing that, to live together as though they *were* married, I persuaded them to wait till everything was through here and come out; and said if they'd do everything as I directed, I'd come with Elizabeth and lend the utmost—er—er—sanction I could to the union. So here we are; and while Mervyn is making all the arrangements

to be married and putting in the necessary term of residence, I thought my daughter and I might be making this journey into the interior . . . to see Reggie."

"I see; but you can't be in such a damned hurry to leave Cape Town. I dare say the hotel is not much to boast of. We are on the eve of changing all that, and if you come out again next year you'll find an hotel equal to the Cecil or the Savoy. Didn't the Governor ask you to stay there?"

"I don't think he did—exactly—though he was *most* kind. But his wife did; only I told her we were so anxious to get away up country. There's no denying it; Mervyn—my son-in-law—is the difficulty. This marriage is new even here; I mean, it has only been possible for about two months; people are still very much against it in England—and, of course, for the Governor to entertain us at his house just beforehand. . . . However, let us assume they *did* ask us, and that I declined, so as to have more freedom to travel."

"All right: assume anything you like; but I think you might very well come and stay with me here from Saturday till Monday, with your young lady, of course, and Mr.—— What's his name? Van Eering?"

"His mother nowadays actually spells and pronounces it like that; but his father always spelt it 'Veneering,' though I dare say it did come, a century or two ago, from a Dutch or Flemish name. Well: it is very kind and the hotel is far from comfortable; we'll accept, Elizabeth and I, and Mervyn, too, if you have got room for all three, and if it doesn't complicate matters, his sleeping out of Cape Town."

"In any case, you and your daughter come—to-day's Thursday—come to-morrow or Saturday, and stay over the week-end—if you can't stay longer. I know a lot about minerals, but very little about botany. Your Mervyn, I suppose, after he's married, is staying on a bit to study our plants? I'd like to help him.

Of course we've got one or two great men out here, studying the flora, and all that, but no one doing so from the point of view of what the bally plants are *worth* . . . except the Disa orchids. I've been in these lands ever since 1870, and I think, from what I've seen of 'native' medicine and even the plants the Boers use, there are lots of things you might turn into first-class drugs. Your son-in-law ought to go up Table Mountain. Most of the things have done flowering now, but that wouldn't matter so much if he examined roots and seeds."

"I'll certainly tell him," said Harmon, "and as to your invitation to us . . . I accept, without making too many phrases about it. I expect both the Governor and his lady will understand that, under the circumstances—well, I don't suppose they'll notice. When I return from the interior and the marriage is over and done with, and if they ask me again before I go home . . . I could go, and not feel I was involving them too much in my daughter's affairs."

"All right, then. I'll tell the servants now, because I have a way of forgetting things."

(*Rings.* Enter butler.)

"Oh, I wanted to say, while I remembered it, that Mr. Harmon and Miss Harmon are coming here tomorrow morning to stay for a few days. See that two rooms are got ready. And another gentleman. . . ." (To Harmon) "What did you say his name was? Veneering? . . ." (To butler): "Mr. Veneering will be coming to lunch and p'raps to dinner most of these days." (To Harmon): "If we find he's got to sleep in town to comply with the regulations about his licence, we can send him back every night." (Servant goes out.) "Well, that's done with. And now, as I've got to go into Cape Town, to the office, I can drive you back to the hotel. I expect my brougham's waiting."

Harmon was fairly tired when he was deposited at his hotel. Mervyn and Elizabeth were seated at a tea table in the verandah, or, as it was locally phrased, "on the stoep." "My *dear* father," exclaimed the latter. "I was beginning to get quite anxious! Where have you been?"

"I'll tell you my long story by degrees; but, wherever I have been, it was mainly on your affairs—and Mervyn's. Fortunately, I am pretty well able now to instruct him what to do; and as to you, you must accompany me to-morrow to stay with the Prime Minister, out at Rondebosch. I dare say I have rather muddled the business in not arranging for Mer to stay there too, but I wasn't quite sure of the licence regulations and whether, if the marriage is to take place in Cape Town, Mervyn hadn't better go on living the prescribed term—a fortnight or three weeks, or whatever it is—at this hotel. At any rate, I've settled it that way; and I thought, as soon as the preliminaries *were* settled—everything that concerned you, my dear—you and I would go off far into the interior and try to get a glimpse of Reggie—go by rail, of course—and finally come back and marry you off here. That 'ud be in about a month, one way and another. Now, I'm *so* tired I shall give you no more explanations till to-morrow. You must be ready then with a sufficiency of luggage, to go with me and stay at Rondebosch till Monday. We leave here about eleven-thirty. Mervyn is to come too, though he may have to return to sleep at the hotel. Everything else shall be explained when I've had a rest."

They reached Groote Schuur by rail and carriage at half-past twelve. A hasty flick of toilette for Elizabeth, a brush-up and a brush-down for the men, and they were in the large drawing-room, where an animated conversation in English and Cape Dutch was

going on. Rhodes was not there. There were, perhaps, twelve or thirteen people present. Harmon and Veneering instinctively felt that one lady out of the four was in the position of hostess by her wearing no hat; so to her they went up and introduced themselves, and Elizabeth.

She was an attractive, handsome creature, who, they afterwards gathered, was a Mrs. Reinhard, wife of Charles Reinhard, a Cape politician, who had just returned from Johannesburg. Though there had been no sign of other guests staying in the house upon Harmon's arrival yesterday, she evidently was in the position of leading lady . . . a woman in the thirties (Harmon told himself, summing her up) . . . most attractive, *sympathique*.

Mrs. Reinhard, amid a rather embarrassing hush, said: "So *you* are the celebrated Mr. Harmon, who is going to cure us of all our health troubles? I have only once been in London—two years ago—but my husband and I—here is my husband—Charles Reinhard—and that, over there, is his brother, Julius." (She pronounced it "Yulius," then corrected herself.) "*What* am I saying? I mean Djulius—Reinhard. You know I am Cape Dutch, and still forget a 'j' isn't a 'y.' . . . I'm not sure your daughter—She *is* your daughter?—ought not to play hostess? However, she is younger and . . . I suppose? . . . unmarried, and I came here yesterday. Come, my dear, and sit next to me on this ottoman. We are waiting for Mr. Rhodes. . . . Here he is!"

And Rhodes, looking a little untidy, in crumpled clothes, and abstracted in thought, entered at this moment and bestowed on the English, Boer, French, and international Jewish gathering a few words, and gave a silent handshake to Harmon and Elizabeth. Then luncheon was announced by the English butler,

and the party—seventeen, eighteen, no, Harmon counted twenty in all—trooped into a large dining-room.

Mrs. Reinhard sat on one side of Rhodes, Elizabeth on the other. A private secretary—the faultlessly-dressed, sombre-looking young man whom Harmon had seen the preceding day at the Chartered Company's office—took the other end of the long table, having on one side of him the wife of a bank-manager, and on the other a nondescript lady of little interest.

Once the women were settled, the men guests placed themselves where they liked; so Harmon dropped into the chair next to the bank-manager's wife, as five or ten minutes later he discovered her to be. . . . Also he found she had only been at Cape Town a few weeks —as a married woman—though she had come out there on a visit the previous winter. She was distinctly pretty, North Irish, and her husband was that good-looking, rather soldierly man on the other side of Elizabeth. "My husband," she informed him, "if he can't sit next me—you see, we've not been married very long—always makes for what he would call the next-best-looking woman in the room. I'm only trying to give you his words. They wouldn't be strictly accurate on this occasion. The best-looking woman here present is, perhaps, Mrs. Reinhard—don't you think so? Because—well, she seems to have come into her own, it is one of those faces that have required a little time beyond girlhood to develop. But your daughter?—I am right: she *is* your daughter?—when she is Mrs. Reinhard's age, will be even more beautiful."

"It is very kind of you to say so. I scarcely like to follow on so dangerous a path, but—you are a rival, at least."

"Oh, I? Well, I expect I am a year or two older than Miss—er—Harmon, and several years younger

than Mrs. Reinhard. But we've embarked on a dangerous trend in conversation. Let's try something safer, less personal, than looks. And in the meantime, don't say 'no, thank you' to those prawns—if they *are* prawns—I believe they're some small, local kind of lobster."

"You say quite truly: they are actually a relation of our own northern lobster, just found round about the Cape of Good Hope."

"Dear me . . . this is a staggerer! I was taking every advantage of you as a new-comer. You've been to the Cape before?"

"I came here as a youth—eighteen, or thereabouts—and worked not many miles away from here, at Constantia, and elsewhere in Cape Colony: returned to England in 1860, and am now seeing Cape Colony like . . . almost like one who had never been here before."

"How curious! Yet at this house one meets with strange things. It is only the second time I have been here since I married. My husband is the manager of Mr. Rhodes's bank. I met him first when I came out last year to stay with my brother and his wife. My brother is in the garrison."

The private secretary here addressed some remark to Mrs.—he hadn't caught her name, exactly—*Mrs. Richardson?*—and Harmon, released for the moment, glanced at Rhodes's end of the table. Mervyn was on the same side as himself, sitting next to Mrs. "Reintje," as he found she was called among her friends—so, at least, he was informed by his neighbour on the left, a Jew with shrewd eyes, a heavy jaw, but rather a prepossessing face. Rhodes was talking most to Elizabeth, who was looking undoubtedly handsome and with more colour in her cheeks than of late. There were just these four women and sixteen men: Rhodes, the private secretary (name not disclosed),

Mr. Charles "Reintje" opposite, himself, Mervyn, and eleven others. Of these, again, his left-hand neighbour and two or three more were Jews of varied types. The others were English, Cape Dutch, a German—possibly—and, judging from his accent, a Frenchman.

Two of the lunchers, in addition to Reinhard, seemed to be members of the Cape Legislature. The remainder, from the scraps of talk he heard, were apparently connected with mines of different kinds. Elizabeth was talking to Rhodes about botany and about Mervyn's work, the Pyrenees, and his discoveries in Central America; and Rhodes, who at first, as he sat down to lunch, had looked heavy and bored, seemed genuinely interested. Mervyn threw in a word or two, to confirm or explain, and the man on the other side of Elizabeth—seemingly a German—added some facts about the Cape flora which were evidently sensational, only Harmon could not catch them.

Moreover, the man on his left was telling him some extraordinary things about diamonds. Then he had some more talk with the distinctly pretty Mrs. Richardson. She had made some remark about his thumbs, and—it seemed—was much interested in palmistry. He promised to show her his hand after lunch, though frankly, he said, he thought it all rubbish. . . . However——

"The old palmistry, mainly founded on Desbarolles, was—a great deal of it—rubbish. . . . But have you read Heron Allen's books, or Mrs. Robinson's? I can't help thinking hands tell character, inclinations, disposition, with remarkable truth. What I am dying to do is to see Mr. Rhodes's hands, I mean close to. But I haven't the courage to ask him! He would think it so 'forward' on my part. You can't imagine what some of the women are like here, in pushing themselves on his attention."

By this time dessert had been sufficiently trifled with,

after a Lucullian repast. So their host rose and proposed as the weather was so brilliant they should drink their coffee on the stoep of the garden side. They passed out, therefore, pausing to talk here, to examine some picture or piece of china there, and thus drifted to the shady side looking towards Table Mountain. The house itself, with a thatched roof, was only of two storeys, but the magnificent trees threw, even in the early afternoon, a broad shadow over the lawn, and beyond this, with Table Mountain completing the picture, were beds of gorgeous flowers in the sunshine: petunias, blue lilies, hydrangeas, and pelargoniums.

Rhodes lurched through the crowd of guests, giving a chair here and there to the ladies, and then caught up with Harmon on the shaded lawn. "I say," he exclaimed, but in not too loud a voice, "I *like* that son-in-law of yours who wants to repeat the experiment—that Veneering chap, I mean. And as to your daughter, she's a ripper. If the one that is dead was as good-looking and as sensible, I don't wonder Veneering wants to take a second wife from the same bunch. . . . But I *like* the chap . . . and it's a rum thing! . . . Don't often meet any one nowadays I like, straightaway. . . . However . . . about this botany . . . I'll do all I can to help him, I mean along the line of vegetable medicines. . . . Idea that appeals to me, though I know precious little about it. Of course, Table Mountain's a great curiosity. . . . Famous all the world over. They tell me some of the things you find up on top there at three thousand feet you don't find anywhere else in Africa—only plants like 'em turn up again in South-west Australia."

"I'm glad you like Mervyn," said Harmon. "I've known him since he was a little boy, two or three years old. I can imagine he's dying to get this marriage over—settled—and go up Table Mountain and explore the flora. . . . I dare say after I'm gone back and

they've married, they could get a house, a cottage, up in the heights and live there a bit?"

"Sure," said Rhodes, once again launched in thoughts that made him silent. Presently he said: "I must be off to Cape Town for a Cabinet meeting, and other things. You'll want a rest. I've enjoyed myself to-day, and somehow—now—it isn't often I'm able to say that—since I became Premier here. . . . That chap Reinhard. . . . He's a rare ass, don't you think? But you've scarcely spoken to him. But his wife's a damned good-looking woman. Only I shall be glad when they're gone . . . back to Jo'burg. She always seems to be on the verge of tears, with me. *I* don't know why! *You* take her on this afternoon, see what you make of her? Now I shall slope—through the stables, and then the others won't know I'm gone. You can tell 'em all in good time."

The next day Harmon and his party and Mrs. Reinhard drove with their host to Houts Bay and had lunch at the inn there. The breakers were magnificent to look at, as the beach, with no protection, faced the South Atlantic. A singularly sunny, caressing afternoon followed; and back at Groote Schuur there was a sleepy tea with little talk: just contentment. There was to be a dinner that Saturday evening to much the same persons as had come to the Friday lunch, followed by a party at half-past nine, to which would come people living round about Rondebosch and Newlands.

At the dinner Elizabeth had the honour of going in on the arm of the Prime Minister; Harmon took in the enigmatic but certainly beautiful, golden-haired Mrs. Reinhard; Mervyn escorted a lady Press-writer who had somehow got invited; and the other woman did not matter enough in the story to be particularised. The Richardsons were coming to the party afterwards, and Mrs. Richardson—some one said—was going to do hands. "What's that?" asked Rhodes. "Oh, she

looks at your hands, both your hands, and tells you about your disposition, how many times you've been in love, or are going to be, how long you're going to live, and as much else as there's time for." "Rubbish!" said the Prime Minister. "I dare say. But I don't suppose any one takes her seriously; in any case, she's a pretty woman, and says rather smart things."

The dinner was remarkable. It was cooked with all the skill of Paris, on an exotic basis of fish, flesh, and fowl, of Eastern vegetables and tropic fruits, with a consoling Anglo-Saxon foundation of the things that really mattered. A variety of rare and delicious wines —three of them grown on the southern slopes of the Table Mountain mass—was served with the courses.

"This *is* an experience," said Harmon, after the third or fourth course. "Difficult to believe I'm seven thousand miles south of Paris, in this beautiful room. . . . Electric light . . . *such* furniture . . . and such food . . . thirty-three years since I was here before. . . . I don't mean in Groote Schuur, but in Cape Town, more or less. . . . Just preparing to go 'home,' as I called it, to claim a property. I stayed—I imagine —at some dirty inn near the harbour, and had wretchedly cooked food . . . tough beef . . . waxy potatoes. Although I understood I was going to be rich, I felt in low spirits when I left Constantia! I wonder what it'll seem like when I'm there on Monday or Tuesday?"

"*I* was born on a farm near Worcester, seventy miles or so from here," said Mrs. Reinhard; "but I suppose I'm only half your age . . . from what you tell me. I certainly wasn't in existence when you last saw Cape Town. Still, in my experience, there has been a great change and expansion in South African life. The diamonds and gold may have done some harm, but they have purchased a deal of comfort

and luxury. . . . You are going far up country, I hear?"

"As far as the railway will take me, to Mafeking, perhaps . . . to see my eldest son. . . . Then I must return to England."

"You sound a little sad as you say that."

"Do I? I'm growing old, that's one reason; and then I shall be leaving behind two people I am very fond of: that young man over there, and my daughter. . . . They, as you know, are going to get married."

"At the Cathedral, I suppose?"

"I don't know. But I am taking my daughter first to see her brother, who is in the Chartered Company's pioneer force. I expect he will be able to ride down to railhead, or Mafeking."

"I see. And after that you return to Cape Town, and then your daughter marries the young man opposite—Mr. . . . Mr.——?"

"Mr. Veneering. He is one of the partners in my business at home."

When his guests had apparently eaten all the dessert they wanted, Rhodes raised his voice and said: "As I'm expecting some friends from round about to look us up this evening, I think we'll adopt the foreign plan —as we call it—of leaving the table together."

So men and women trooped from the dining-room to the two drawing-rooms, where already some of the guests for the evening had assembled. Amongst these were the Richardsons. "We could not come to dine, though Mr. Rhodes was kind enough to ask us, but here we are to spend the evening. We are sleeping at the Staceleys's house hard-by; in fact, we have come with them. I wonder whether I shall have the courage to ask to see Mr. Rhodes's hand to-night? I *do* so want to, because I am afraid my husband and I will have to go to Natal for a tour of inspection, and

Goodness knows where the Premier will be when we come back. Some say he is going to England as soon as the Legislature rises."

Thus Mrs. Richardson. John Harmon, feeling bolder than most—he liked Rhodes, and, apart from that, did not care if he *was* snubbed—went up to the great man with Mrs. Richardson—almost visibly trembling—and said: "This little lady is very anxious to look at your hands—palmistry, you know! She's *very* discreet and *very* much afraid, so I said *I'd* ask."

"Oh, very well," said the Premier, a little crossly. "It's fearful rubbish, but if it gives you any pleasure."

They retired to a broad ottoman in an embrasure where there was a shaded electric light. "Can I do anything more?" asked Harmon. "Oh, *would* you, *could* you be so good as to find me some paper and a pencil?" "You'll see as much as she's likely to want of both in the next room, the library," growled Rhodes.

Half an hour later he approached the little retreat. Rhodes had risen and was striding away, not looking particularly amiable. Mrs. Richardson was poring over her pencil notes. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed, "It *has* been rather an unnerving experiment! I hope I haven't made him angry. I didn't venture to tell him *half* the things I saw, for—for—fear it might make him angry—and my husband, of course, wants to get on well with him. So I'm afraid I seemed to him very stupid, and he thought it all a great waste of time. I suppose you know he's left-handed? P'raps he didn't like my finding that out, or that he had a bent finger on his right hand. But—but—these are some of the things I have noted regarding the future. Of course, I know he was born somewhere about 1853, so it's easy to guess him at forty years of age. There's some one man in whom he believes tremendously. This man pulls off a considerable success very soon, just about

Rhodes's present age; but a few years later his affairs —his or Rhodes's—come to utter smash. Either he or Rhodes goes to prison, and I don't think Rhodes lives to be over fifty. Yet, to a great extent his work picks itself up and is ultimately successful. It is an extraordinary hand in many ways: such amazing successes and yet such disasters. I'll work out my notes fully to-morrow. But do you know, I'm rather sorry I went as far as I did. Don't tell any one! I shan't tell my husband, and I dare say Mr. Rhodes will forget. He must be getting so used to being bothered by people like me that I don't suppose he will remember me specially spitefully."

Harmon tendered what calming advice he could think of, and it was—fortunately (he thought)—curtailed by the strains of a violin, exquisitely played. Other music of an orchestra followed. A few people danced the waltz of the period—probably a slow one. Rhodes was no more seen by any one that evening.

Neither was he visible to his guests on the Sunday morning, but he put in an appearance at lunch time, a little abstracted in thought and silent. When he did speak it was on the subject of medicine plants. He had been greatly taken with the idea that valuable drugs might be discovered in South Africa, and directed most of his talk to Mervyn and Harmon. All three agreed that the best area for examination would be Table Mountain and the analogous ranges of old sandstone formation in the south and south-west of Cape Colony. When that had been done, a glance at Basutoland—though it was rumoured to be very disappointing in plants, even if Alpine in height—and to finish up with, botanical collecting in the mountains of Mashonaland. There were reported to be heights of eight thousand feet and more in that direction. Perhaps on the way thither or thence Mervyn might be able to turn aside

to verify Theodore Bent's amazing discoveries of Phœnician or Arab ruins at Zimbabwe.

Such conversations as these, Harmon was living through again a few days later, when he and Elizabeth were travelling north-eastward in a luxurious first-class compartment, pounding on through the interior of Cape Colony towards Kimberley. They had spent a long day at Constantia, where the vineyards were now under Government management. No trace remained of the de Vries establishment. The "old man" had died twenty years ago . . . more than that; his widow had survived till 1880. The rest of the family had moved eastward. . . . Worcester.

Then there had been a return to the Cape Town hotel and a parting with Mervyn; who, as soon as all the marriage arrangements were settled against their coming back, was to begin exploring Table Mountain, partly with a view to finding a house to live in, not too far from the summit.

So they had at last finished a crowded week, and Rhodes had retained a compartment for them in the great express which, in those days, ran three times a week to the verge of the Bechuanaland Protectorate, where—also in those days—the Chartered Company's operations commenced.

A night's journey finished the really striking scenery of the coast ranges. Thenceforth, for as far as the railway might be constructed, there would be little worth looking at from the compartment windows in the way of scenery. The landscapes might be vast, but Elizabeth thought them pitifully vacuous. A few blobs of low trees, a low, even ridge against the northern sky of some undistinguished plateau; corrugated iron buildings near the line; once, in a way, a corrugated iron church or school.

A long wait at Kimberley was enlivened by an ample meal at the railway restaurant and a walk out of the station to the undistinguished, low-built, corrugated iron town, besprinkled with young trees. Another wait at Taungs. And at Vryburg—as it was by that time spelt, "Vrijburg" looking too "Dutch"—the train journey came officially to an end.

But they had been preceded here by telegrams from Cape Town, and were met by representatives both of the Colonial Government and of the company. It was thought possible, though the line to Mafeking was not yet open to the public, to send them thither in a service train the next day. Every one was so kind, the air at this height of nearly four thousand feet was so exhilarating they were disposed to make the best of everything. They took up their abode at the railway hotel, mainly constructed of corrugated iron . . . though the kitchen portion was of bashful, blushing brick. "How I *love* bricks," said Elizabeth to her father; "I never thought I could so hate corrugated iron or feel such a delight in bricks and mortar. Of course, when there is nothing else available, I understand the poor things using these sheets of galvanised iron; but *why* make it twice as ugly with these corrugations?"

So . . . at last . . . they had reached Mafeking. Seven years later it would have become a place of world-wide fame; but at the end of February, 1893, it was only known to missionaries as the former "capital" of the Barolong tribe, and to Cape politicians as the centre of a hazy administration of British Bechuanaland. Some twenty miles to the north, across a little river, began the still vaguer Bechuanaland Protectorate, which would shortly come under the control of the Chartered Company.

A week's delay was passed in this place by means of long rides on lent horses, in absolutely perfect weather.

The Administrator gave them hospitality. They investigated the native kraals, the mission schools, the railway works. One day, at the half-finished railway station, John Harmon was watching repairs to a pilot engine, when a tall, bearded young man—sun-helmet, gaiters, cords, red shirt—looked him in the face and said, "*Father?*"

It was Reggie, not seen by his parent since the December of 1890, when he had been home for a very short holiday. "I'm commandant, just now, at Fort Tuli, fortunately. . . . Might otherwise have been a month's ride farther off. I got your January letter, so I wasn't surprised at the telegram; and the morrow after getting *that* I had my leave and started off and have ridden like hell, day after day, to be here in time. . . . Are you alone?"

"Dear me! This *is* delightful! How well and strong you look! Alone? Why, no. I've got dear Elizabeth with me."

"Elizabeth? You mean Lizzie? However, it's the same thing. Then mother stayed at home? And where is the widower?"

"Mervyn? He's at Cape Town."

"*That's* all right. Now let's find Lizzie. . . . I say, Dad, they aren't surely going to get married?"

"They are."

"But it's against the law!"

"Not now, not in Cape Colony. They've come out here to get married, and *will* be married presently at Cape Town; after which I shall betake myself home again, and Mervyn and Lizzie will stay out here for a bit. Mervyn wants to study the Cape flora for the usual purposes, medicine plants. . . ." John Harmon paused. They were walking away from the station in the direction of the white man's town. He placed a hand on his son's right arm. "Reggie, old man. Let's bury here—before we find Elizabeth—

this foolish old quarrel—one-sided quarrel, on your side only. You may have thought, years ago, I showed undue favour to a youth who was no relation of ours, but whose father had virtually created this drug business. I might have taken much less interest in him if either you or John or both of you had thrown yourselves into this hunt for drugs and medicines. But you didn't. Let's hope the things you have taken up—yours promises splendidly—will turn out brilliantly. But *be* a sportsman! Don't crab my ventures in which Mervyn has helped—ah! you little know how much. Hettie's death was a ghastly blow to him. Now, three years afterwards, he wants to marry her sister, *your* sister, Elizabeth. The idiotic bishops at home say he shan't—you know their utterly unreasonable arguments. . . . Well, here, the more enlightened public opinion says 'You may.' Put this foolish, old, boyish jealousy out of your mind, come down to the Cape *and see him married!* More than that: see if you can't get a few months' leave, *three* months' leave? I hear from Rhodes big things may be taking place hereabouts in the late summer. Come and see Rhodes in Cape Town. . . . We've been staying with him. . . . See Mer and Lizzie married, and *then* see *me* home! It *would* delight your dear mother, more than anything else in the world. Have a quiet month with us at home; then, if you still want to finish your job out here, return and carry it through?"

"All right," said Reggie. He looked his father in the face and saw his eyes full of tears. He stretched out a very sunburnt hand and wrung the hand his father extended. Then they went to meet Elizabeth, who was almost running towards them.

CHAPTER XIX

MERVYN AND REGGIE

Trelawney Villa,
Table Mountain,
Cape of Good Hope.
June 1, 1893.

MY DEAR FATHER,

Here we are, installed at last, on Table Mountain. The house has a ridiculous name, but it seems to be well known, and as it is only a temporary installation I doubt if it would be wise to change it. Apparently it was built about 1850 by some eccentric official in Cape Town. It is flat-roofed (a feature we much enjoy) and has a largish walled garden, and water is laid on from a delicious little spring hard by which afterwards develops into a tiny rivulet and feeds the new reservoir nearly two miles to the south. I liked the exterior of the house directly I saw it, and its position for collecting is superb. But the interior was a horror. It had not been properly inhabited for five or six years. However, Lizz and I were bursting with energy, and through Rhodes's backing we got a nondescript band of workmen—a mixture of all the world's races, they seemed. But they were good-natured and cheery, and two months' steady work ended by making the villa clean, comfortable, and adapted to my studies. Lizz is delighted with it. We have three spare rooms besides our own two bedrooms,

so there is space for a family if we start one during our sojourn or if any of you bring out our Hetty. But, of course, we both feel in our inmost souls a determination to get back to you all, as soon as our tiny circle has got used to our marriage.

Reggie landed at Cape Town about a week ago, and must now be somewhere beyond Mafeking on his way back to Mashonaland. There is a whisper about Groote Schuur and Cape Town that Jameson means trying conclusions with the Matabele * this summer or autumn; and so Reggie only spent one night at our place and started next day for Mafeking and Tuli. He looked awfully well, and it is a source of *intense* satisfaction to Lizz and me that we are friends again. I pressed on him the importance—with the means at his command—of settling down himself to something more definite than a roving African life. He, however, believes with Jameson and Rhodes that the highlands of Matabele- and Mashona-land are immensely rich in gold. Otherwise, why did they attract these prehistoric invaders? There are traces of their workings, very methodical workings, all over the country between the Limpopo and the Zambezi, he says. Of course they did little more than take away the surface gold. I don't suppose they burrowed very deep. Modern machinery, he thinks, will draw huge fortunes for thousands of men out of Mashonaland and Manikaland, hard by. He himself wants to make fifteen thousand pounds, says he'd be content with *fifteen, if* it came quickly. Then he'll come home, settle down, marry, and go in for Parliament.

I hope all this may come true. Personally I think he's much improved by these years on the veld.

I've rambled with Lizz—(Elizabeth is the more

* Mervyn at this stage did not know the right spelling of Amandebele or of its Tebele root word.—AUTHOR.

stately name, I admit, but it is too long for home use and home-circle letters. How did the ancients manage about their names? They may have written very little, but they must have talked as much as we do. Did the friends of Aristoboulos call him "Stob" in private?)—I've rambled with Lizz all over Table Mountain and the neighbouring heights, but of course the best season for flower displays is from November to March. February-June is the time for seeds, and seeds and roots are vastly more interesting from *our* point of view. So, on the whole, this has been the right time for me, though I have not been able to identify all my specimens. I recommend your looking into the two kinds of Anacampseros and the roots of Mesembrythanthemum edule. I want to have the Buphane bulbs (enormous in size) locally examined and tested, as they are really too large to send to you. They produce the virulent poison of the Bushmen's arrows. What is poison when too strong, is often a valuable drug when much diluted. I hear from Reggie that there are several kinds of Strophanthus up in Mashonaland, especially round those amazing ruins of Phœnician or ancient Arab towns. I remember vividly first hearing of Strophanthus some thirteen years ago, when I was working at the Mincing Lane office with Mr. Wilfer, and his daughter, Mrs. Venables—still acting, I suppose?—came in and nibbled some and was borne out swooning! I feel quite tenderly towards the genus in consequence. It does not seem to be found in southernmost Africa. Reggie, by the bye, says there are mountains of over 8,000 feet in Mashonaland! I *must* go there!

* * * * *

Your affectionate son,
MERVYN.

From Madison Corness.

38, Mincing Lane,
E. C.
December 24, 1893.

Dear old Mervyn,

I am almost alone in the office, except for old Slopey. We are closing up for the Christmas holidays —three days—and I, personally, am going to be absent —as usual—at Chacely till New Year's Day. Helen is down there already with her two babies. She has grown quite strong again, I am thankful to say, and the second child promises to be as great a beauty as the first. I can't help thinking father's medicines—we all call him "father," and all think of our drugs as "his," though *you* may have invented a third and I, or my people in the States, have discovered a fourth of them—well, I was going to say I can't help thinking father's medicines have had a lot to do with improving the conditions of parturition ever since he threw himself into the investigation of puerperal fever after Hetty's death. So in case you should have hopes in regard to Elizabeth I do trust you will have seen to it that you are thoroughly well supplied with all the drugs we could send you? Of course a perfectly healthy person needs no drugs. But how many among us—us, vocal, reasoning, important people—at the end of the nineteenth century, *are* perfectly healthy? We are for ever running risks.

By the bye, I wonder if you heard anything from or of Miriam Cochrane? Did you know she is another Sarai? She actually had a baby last October! You must have heard that, or seen it in the papers. . . . It was a little girl, so not quite a repetition of the Isaac legend. . . . Victor was more excited about it than she was, I think. He telegraphed for about half a dozen accoucheurs and a like number of nurses; and became tremendously joyful when—after a very bad

time (they say)—she began to recover. I expect you saw the notices about it which he put into the papers, and which she must have ground her teeth over, when she read them. He cannot resist advertising and thought it might help his candidature. They are fussing so much now about the child that I expect they won't come to Chacely for Christmas. Mother—Mrs. Harmon—is going there later on to give advice.

We received, last October, your large consignment of specimens. I expect the report almost daily and will despatch it immediately. I understand from mother there *are* hopes of a definite nature in regard to your wife and that you are proposing to remain at Trelawney Villa till the business is well over—say till next March or April.

People here at home seem to have taken Rhodes's business very well. There is a little snarling in the Radical Press—very little, however. We were rather shocked to learn of the death of Major Forbes and thirty-five men round about Lobengula's camp—cut off by the rise of some river. But perhaps the story has been exaggerated. Reggie seems to have done awfully well out of the whole business, and has been specially mentioned in several reports.

That wonderful old woman, Mme. de Lamelle—her age must be well over seventy; father says she wasn't far off forty when he first saw her in 1861—is still to the fore. She and Georgy make stately progresses up and down the French approach to the Pyrenees, looking in at Gaston's plantations to see how they are getting on, and not staying long enough to irritate the French gardeners.

I suppose you hear regularly from Jeanne? And realise they have six children now, with the boy that was born last July? Gaston says it's a lesson to his nation—six healthy children, three boys and three girls. And he has also by now six magnificent drug planta-

tions, four in or near the Gave d'Aspe and two in the Eastern Pyrenees, near Prades.

But his hair has gone grey and thin in the process. France is taking colonisation very seriously and is making huge demands on Gaston's firm for drugs for West Africa and the Congo. The growing trouble in tropical Africa is this blackwater fever—Hæmoglobinuria. I hear there are cases of it as far south as Delagoa Bay; so it may come under your notice. It has broken out very badly in Madagascar. France is in for a lot of trouble in that direction, I fear, and is piling up all the elements of civil and religious war at home. . . .

Well, dear old chap, here are hopes of the very best for your happy future, and that of Elizabeth, from Helen and me. I told her I would include her name when I wrote to you. As soon as she has settled her babies' demands for accommodation at Chacely she will write to her sister. . . . Come home soon, but before you come find out all about Strophanthus in South Africa. Johnston has sent us three kinds from Nyasaland. . . .

Your affectionate brother-in-law,
MADISON.

In the spring of 1894, Elizabeth had her first baby at the much-attended to, renovated, cleaned, and flowery Trelawney Villa. Mervyn had little thought of anything but of her for a month beforehand and a month afterwards. But when the boy-baby had been christened, and all the necessary correspondence about it had taken place, and Elizabeth had regained her beauty and vigour, he fretted very much at the loss of her companionship. "Darling," she said, resting her rounded cheek on the sleeve of his Norfolk jacket, "I wish I could divide into two. But *what* am I to do, and *why* isn't this situation taken into account in nov-

els? Novel writers concern themselves so little about the rearing of babies, as though infants, directly they were born, had teeth and could eat chops and tomato sauce. There is no one out here I could get in as a wet-nurse. Besides, nowadays, we spurn wet-nurses. You know if you were considering any case but ours, you would say it was *preposterous* to bring up our child on a black woman's or a brown woman's, or any other woman's milk. When you come to think of it, it is *unnatural.* And then these artificial milk preparations—well, of course they're better than nothing, and if the mother really *can't* nurse the child, they have to be resorted to. But they can't be so good as the natural means—at any rate for the first six months."

So Mervyn devoted himself, with an occasional sigh of regret, during the dry season—their spring—of 1894 to the nearly inexhaustible botanical wonders and drug plants of Table Mountain, of the Devil's Peak, and of Constantia Peak; and to first short and then long excursions to the mountain ranges of the north and east; to the Lange Bergen, the Outenikwa mountains, and the Groote Zwarte Bergen. He bought a Cape cart with a waterproof cover, enlisted two travelling servants—Cape boys—and where the railways could not take him he drove, if any possible road existed, northwards to Clanwilliam, and eastwards as far as Port Elizabeth. All the mountain ranges here, in this southernmost part of Africa, were of Lower Devonian sandstone, like Table Mountain—and possessed a marvellous flora and many remarkable drug-yielding plants and trees. Botanically, this was South Africa's wonderland, the Australian and South American relationships of its plants arousing spectacled botanists to frenzy, so that Mervyn's discoveries caused a hissing and a clamour far off at Kew and Cambridge, at the Sorbonne, at Leyden, Berlin, and Bonn. Quantities of seeds and bulbs were sent to Gaston to plant in

the Pyrenees, and a secondary collection went to Corness and Crabtree in New York, to see what could be done with them in suitable American grounds.

In March, 1895, Elizabeth thought she might *occasionally* leave her child—the beloved Cecil Hamilton Veneering—for a day and a night and another day to the care of an excellent nurse, the widow of an English soldier; so she and Mervyn had some delightful rambles together in the mountains of the south. In the autumn, however, it was evident she was going to have another child. Therefore Mervyn had ingenious things done by carpenters in his Cape cart, so that it, or much of it, took to pieces and was transportable in railway vans. Thus the cart and three mules were conveyed (by the ever-extending railway that Rhodes was urging northwards) to Mafeking; and after a halt here and a halt there the tropics were reached, and a visit was paid to Southern Mashonaland, to the region of the mysterious stone cities—Zimbabwe and the like.

Mervyn was not learned as an archæologist; he formed his impressions, perhaps, too readily and all-roundedly. But he became quickly convinced that, whatever might be said of the heaps and circles of rough, untrimmed stones to be met with in the country of the Matabele (once part of this same Monomotapa Empire and only conquered early in the nineteenth century by the Zulus), or of the gold-mining there in the Middle Ages, Zimbabwe, and most of the ruins like it, were never built by Bantu negroes. And they were before the age of Islam, even though Muhammadan Arabs had carried their trade thither in succession to their pre-Islamic forefathers.

But of course, though archæology was a fascinating side-issue and a thrilling cause of quarrel, the main purpose of his journey across the southern tropic was a search for vegetable drugs, and he was enthusiastic

over his discovery of a new Strophanthus of great potency and a local variety of the Castor oil plant, as well as of certain Indian and Persian drug-plants, which had quite possibly been brought into South-east Africa by the builders of Zimbabwe.

* * * * *

When Mervyn left Zimbabwe a fortnight before Christmas, 1895, he was dimly aware that great doings were pending in Bechuanaland and the Western Transvaal. Reggie Harmon was not at Fort Tuli as he passed through. "Still at Pitsane, I suppose?" he had said half questioningly to the sergeant-major in command, a grizzled veteran of two or three Colonial wars. "Couldn't say, sir, I am sure. Instructions was 'No letters to be forwarded at present.'"

Day after day he drove in his covered Cape cart along the rough track called a road which ran through Palapye close to the half-made railway line. Then he crossed the railway to Shoshong and passed to Molepolole and Gaberones, and so on, back to the finished and functioning line at Pitsane Pothlogo. He reached this place on December 30, to find it in a state of mystery, a state of siege. All telegraphic communications with the south and east were cut off. Fortunately he was known to several persons who remained in authority over the place. One of them said to him: "Old man! Dr. Jim's taken the plunge, and your friend Captain Harmon's gone with him——"

"Where?"

"Where should they go? To Johannesburg, some say; to Pretoria, others. My own belief is that Dr. Jim's makin' for Pretoria, straight away. He'll take the Boers absolutely by surprise and collar the arsenal. Then Johannesburg will join him."

"I'm not so absolutely amazed as you might think. I guessed there was something of the kind in preparation. But—but—will it succeed?"

"With most other people I'd say 'yes'; but to you —well—I don't know. He's got barely five hundred men with him—white men—and about two thousand natives. . . . Oh, I don't mind speakin' out to you, knowin' who you are, and it's about over now, one way or another, and you couldn't telegraph if you wanted to. We cut off all communications two days ago. . . . But his five hundred—or four hundred and eighty—or ninety—whatever it is—are picked men, great riders, good shots; and Dr. Jim's a *gem*. It's a beastly word to say, but I think I'm up to it, for I'm dead sober while this tension lasts. . . . Dr. Jim's a stra-te-*gi*-shan. There! Got it right! Well, he *is*. About four thousand picked fighters, mainly English, under Franky Rhodes, ought to join him from Jo'burg. . . . And what are *you* going to do, 'cos I've fifty things I must see to——?"

"I know. I quite understand. I ought to think things over for an hour or so, before I decide. I suppose the road to the south—to Cape territory—is closed for the moment?"

"Abso*lute*ly, till we get news—and orders——"

"Should you try and stop me if I drove eastwards—after them?"

"I should, if I knew positively you were goin' there —but need I know? I've got a lot, a devil of a lot to do—I can't watch you to see where you're goin'. I only know you won't get to Mafeking. There's no great choice of roads, but if you turn your Cape cart eastwards in Dr. Jimmy's tracks, and I don't know for certain you're doin' so, you *might* get through and see the fun; or you might get shot by either side; or more likely have your bloody buggy taken from you for an ambulance and have to walk home. This much is clear, you *can't* go *south* and you *can't* go *west*—in order to go south some other way. You can go the northern road; and if you go eastwards into the Transvaal

you'll either fall in with our people, whom you know——"

Mervyn: "I should think so! Why, one of them's my brother-in-law——!"

Interlocutor: ". . . whom you know, or else with the Boers. Well, you're a grown man, and I believe rather a big pot in some scientific direction. . . . So long! Ta, ta!"

Mervyn and his native servants took the mules out of the cart and saw them tethered where they could rest, roll, and feed. His servants prepared a mid-day meal which he ate—thankful, meantime, for the extraordinary quiet which hung over Pitsane Pothlogo. It was very hot, the southern mid-summer. Towards five, after a cup of tea, they harnessed the mules and drove eastward along the very obvious, very dusty, broad, and bestrewn track which Dr. Jim's little army of mounted men had made a day and a half earlier. Following this force of five hundred men, more or less, and not hanging far behind, there had been an irregular band of two thousand negro and negroid servants, "boys," clerks, and what-not else; so that this route into the Transvaal along the Witwatersrand had been traversed by a small army.

There was a moon, nearly full; therefore Mervyn drove on after sunset, through the open country, along the dusty road. Owing to the looseness of the soil on the pounded road, his mules did barely six miles an hour. At ten o'clock at night, he stopped at a camping place near Ottoshoop where the road crossed a small stream—the Mariko—not far from its source. This had evidently been a halting place for the expedition on its first day; probably for a mid-day meal. It was from various indications just inside Transvaal territory. His Cape boy coachman fastened the mules to an acacia tree-trunk a little distance off the track. For

form's sake the other servant, normally a cook, was told off to remain awake and watch whilst Mervyn and the coachman slept. Whether he did so or not mattered little, for the other two slept very lightly. The night was singularly silent; only distant barkings of dogs at Ottoshoop could be heard. Not a sound from the great, trampled, dusty track. A glorious dawn at half-past four, and by daylight—five—they were on the road again which the little army had followed. A few large and repulsive bare-necked griffon vultures rose with hops and flaps before their advance, and flew eastward ahead of them.

By noon on the next day they were at a gorge in the Witwatersrand heights where a stream, shrunken and shallow so near its source, broke through the hills on a northward course. Here they came suddenly on a great assemblage of people, mainly black-skinned and brown, with five or six white Rhodesian police in control, put in that position from the forward-moving band because they were sick or injured.

"Sorry, sir," said one of these, who recognised Mervyn instinctively as a "gentleman," and took him for some belated surgeon; "Dr. Jim's orders were that no one was to pass further along this road till he sent word."

"All right. I don't want to fall foul of any one or fly in the face of any rules. But what is Dr. Jim doing here? This is Transvaal territory. I must have left a hundred miles of it behind me, at least. Why, there must have passed along here a small army, and my brother-in-law's in it. . . . What is it all about?"

Guessing now he was not a surgeon, the man spoke more roughly. "Sure, I couldn't tell you! But my orders are: 'Don't allow any one to come on further till permission is given.' That's all. If that's not good

enough, I'll have the mules taken out of your cart." With that he turned away, limping.

Mervyn decided to wait events for a day or two, to see what turned up. He slept through a good deal of the morrow—January 2, 1896—inside his Cape cart. On the morning of the succeeding day there was a vague uneasiness about the scattered mob of coloured men. In the afternoon their numbers lessened. Towards sunset three of the white Rhodesian police had their horses saddled and themselves, despite strains and pains and other damage, hoisted into the saddle. One of them, as he rode westwards, passed close to Mervyn's cart. "I should advise you," he said in a lowered voice, "to inspan and return the way you came—drive back to British territory—all night if you can. Something seems to have gone wrong. I'm off to Mafeking to find out what it is——"

Mervyn thanked him and said he'd think about it. Inwardly he decided to wait till after sunset and moonrise, in case a couple of hours brought more decisive news. . . . On second thoughts, however, he had the mules harnessed, and then sat back in the cart watching the fading splendour of the sunset and what was happening among the black men. Something like a third of them had gone, he imagined, but quite two-thirds were staying on, determined to remain where they were till they had news of their masters. The colour gradually faded from the western sky, but a new daylight—greenish yellow—appeared in the east and out of it a superb full moon rose into sight, slowly changing from a clear straw-yellow, with all the dry seas clearly marked, into a dazzling white. . . . Hang it all! Whatever he did, he mustn't go to sleep. . . . Was he dreaming, or was some one speaking? "Baas," some one was saying. He sat up on the seat inside the covered cart. "What is it?"

It was not one of his own men speaking, but rather

an oddly dressed, tall, athletic negro, of whose voice he had some strange reminiscence. . . . He was again talking, low and jerkily, in some African language. From its clicks it must be Zulu or Kafir. Evidently the man was intensely in earnest, almost inclined to cry. . . . Mervyn descended from the cart and sized him up and down, out in the moonlight. . . . Why, it was a man of Reggie's—a sort of groom, horse-boy. . . . He had seen him months ago at Fort Tuli. . . . Not waiting to understand further he followed as the man walked away and beckoned. No one stopped them at the stream. . . . They crossed it—passed through brushwood to a little hollow a hundred yards or so from the broad track. . . . And there was a weary-looking horse with hanging head and some kind of a trooper huddled—tied—on its back, unconscious or making no sign.

From his recognition of the native servant he was prepared to recognize Reggie in this pitiable figure. As he went up to the horse, whose reins had been fastened to a branch and who was still trembling and shuddering in its fatigue, the huddled figure slightly raised its head and uttered some incomprehensible remark from a dry throat. The Matabele groom sprang up behind and supported the wounded white man. Mervyn untied the horse and led it back to the road, and thence across the stream to his cart.

He roused his two servants. With the aid of the Matabele they gently detached Reggie Harmon from the saddle and lowered him into their arms; then carried him to Mervyn's cart and placed him on the seat in as prone an attitude as possible. He was only half conscious. Mervyn realised that his shirt and riding breeches were stiff with dried blood from the middle of the back to the thighs. . . . His weary horse, which had borne two men on its desperate ride from the scene of a fight, was relieved of saddle and bridle and turned loose

to graze or to follow the cart. This it actually did, for the cart, on account of the wounded man, went at a walking pace along the dusty road westward.

Mervyn had first thought of driving steadily towards Mafeking and getting there—perchance—before any advancing Boer force could stop him; but in view of Reggie's half-conscious, nearly dead condition, such an heroic scheme was out of the question. He found a track branching off to the south from that which had been followed by Jameson's force and drove gently along it through the moonlit night. In the morning he came to a Boer farm near the source of a stream which flowed southward to the Vaal. It was a quiet country as yet, uninfected with gold discoveries, and the Boers at the farm had heard nothing of any Jameson raid. Fortunately Mervyn, after two and a half years of South Africa, had turned his remembrance of Flemish into a working acquaintance with the Taal of Dutch South Africa. He told, to the mistress of the farm, a plausible tale of a shooting accident, and she, taken with his pleasant looks and touched by his sadness, summoned her husband and sons and ordained the bringing in of the badly-wounded man from the cart and his being placed, very gently and carefully, on a flat bed of dried fern and blankets which they had arranged on a shaded portion of the stoep while progress could be made for lodging him inside.

The guest-room upstairs was offered for Reggie's use, but Mervyn, after glancing at the way thither—a rough ladder-staircase—doubted whether it would be possible to convey him upwards without further injury to the spine. What was to be done? . . . The verandah or stoep was impossible; there was little protection from weather and night chills; the large kitchen-eating-sitting-room belonged too much to the family to be thought of as a sick-room. . . . But he detected a door on one side of the chimneypiece, opened the latch and

peered into a smaller and very stuffy apartment, evidently reserved as a sitting-room of honour. It had glassed windows, hermetically shut, and smelt rather pungently of unescaped smoke that had drifted in from cracks in the kitchen chimney wall. But this was the pre-destined refuge. And there was little time for parleying or hesitancy. "*Could* we have the use of your 'bezoekkamer?'" (parlour) he asked in Cape Dutch.

The farmer's wife looked very reluctant; her pleasant face quite clouded, and if Mervyn had spoken in English she would have definitely refused. But the fact that he could speak some sort of recognisable Taal added to the prepossession of his face and manner. She consented—and to make this acquiescence more willing, Mervyn added that they would of course meet all the expense of a cleaning up when the patient was well enough to be removed.

So, as there was no time to lose (he explained) if Reggie was not to die, they got to work with a will. The window was opened, the sons aiding; the furniture was put on the stoep to be afterwards disposed of, a wooden bed-frame with hide lashings was brought in and feather beds were placed on it. A large pillow was fetched from some other room; and after an hour's strenuous work the still unconscious wounded man was laid on the bed, on which Mervyn's waterproof sheet had been placed, so that his wounds might be examined thoroughly, then washed and dressed.

These movements restored Reggie to a brief interval of consciousness. He recognised Mervyn with such a look of relief on his haggard face as was—to Mervyn—more than sufficient reward for his trouble of mind.

At first the latter thought, out of delicacy, that his undressing the wounded man, his examination of his wounds should be conducted with the help only of male

assistants; but Mevrouw Veehoeder (as he found her name was) would have none of that. She explained, in Cape Dutch, that her husband and sons had several times had gunshot wounds and that she was as good as any *heelmeester* (surgeon) who could be got—if there were any such who would deign to make a long journey from a mining centre. Mervyn understood the drift of her meaning, and realised the truth of her words. She turned out of the room—which, though rough, was now cleanly, and with a pleasant scent that came from roses blooming outside—all the other persons in it save Mervyn and her husband; who, being told to go and seat himself on the stoep till he was wanted, did so meekly, and from thence carried on a conversation with his sons below.

Mervyn and Mrs. Veehoeder removed Reggie's long boots with ease; but the riding breeches, shirt, and underclothing were a great difficulty as they were coated, stiff with blood, round the middle of his body. The father Boer was ordered by his wife to go into the kitchen and prepare warm water and bring in a tub. Mervyn also went out to his cart and returned with his india-rubber bath and anything he had in the way of spare underclothes, needle and cotton, scissors and cotton wool. The Boeress, on his return, went to other rooms and came back with clean rags and an old petticoat which could be torn up.

With infinite trouble over obstacles which seemed insurmountable, much stumbling up the staircase-ladder and clambering down again, much application of hot water, many groans from the now-aroused Reggie, they removed all his clothing and the dried blood from both sides of his body, and found the wounds in front only on the surface, but that behind he had narrowly escaped death by a severing of the spine. The spinal marrow must still be intact, because he could feel pain in his lower limbs; but evidently the bone above it had

been ploughed through by a bullet, just where it emerged from the heavy musculature of the back. With returning consciousness came on an agonising pain; besides, it was apparent to any one who knew anything about anatomy that the greatest care must be taken not to jar or dislocate the wounded spine. It seemed as though, for some days, Mervyn must remain constantly with his brother-in-law, whilst assistance was being summoned. And where was he to summon it from?

Mrs. Veehoeder suggested Potchefstroom as the nearest place. Her second boy, Marcus, who was handiest with beasts, would ride there on one of the gentleman's mules—Reggie's war horse being very lame—and deliver a letter. So a letter was written to an anonymous surgeon or doctor of medicine (surgeon preferable—it stated) and sent off by Marcus Veehoeder, the latter being adjured by his mother only to deliver it at the house of one who should be recommended as the best "*heelmeester*" in Potchefstroom. This surgeon was informed that an English gentleman lay very ill at Mr. Veehoeder's farm of a bullet wound in the back. With him was his brother-in-law, Mr. Veneering of Table Mountain, who could not leave the patient, but would pay a good surgeon or physician a sufficient fee to come out from Potchefstroom and attend to the wound.

Mervyn likewise considered it might be a good thing, as it would be impossible to move his patient for weeks from where he was, not to rely too much on the seclusion and quiet of the farm. It must be within three or four days' riding or driving journey of the boiling-over Johannesburg. He only guessed that something had gone wrong with Jameson, not being able to get the least information out of Reggie or from his Matabele henchman. These Boers with whom he was lodging might know a little Sesuto, but they cer-

tainly knew no Kafir or Zulu, and Inkunzi the Matabele only spoke Zulu or some form of "kitchen Kafir." Evidently Reggie was here as a defeated soldier, who had found his way in arms into a country with whom we were not at war. What should he do? Wait till he had recovered speech and intelligence to find out the facts? That was the best.

On the third day after their arrival at Wilgenbosch farm, Marcus returned on the mule and announced the coming of Dr. Christophsohn just behind him. The doctor was a fair-haired, spectacled young German, born in the Transvaal, but educated for medicine in the Rhine valley. He examined Reggie summarily, asked a few questions in English, and then turned round on Mervyn, and pulling him gently into the light of the window looked into his face and felt his pulse.

"I will see after your brother—is he not your brother?—well, your brother-in-law. I will stay the night here and ride back to-morrow morning. But, meantime—and now—*you* must go to bed—go to bed and sleep till I wake you to-morrow morning. . . ." Then he turned to the Boer hostess and asked her in the Taal if a bed could not be made up for Mervyn elsewhere. He himself would pass the night with the wounded man, with intervals of rest in the kitchen.

Mrs. Veehoeder suggested the guest-room upstairs could be got ready by to-morrow; meantime Mervyn might make do with the sofa at the far end of the kitchen. "All right," he answered, almost sleeping as he stood up. "I'll start with a snooze on the 'rustbank.' I don't think I ever felt so sleepy."

He lay down on this fearsome article of furniture, so exhausted and overstrained, yet so relieved by the arrival of a competent physician who could speak English, that he slept till about eight in the evening; was told his brother was at any rate no worse; ate, half in a dream, some soup his hostess placed before him; and

then slept again till the early morning, when the doctor roused him and said in pedantic English:

"Your brother has come near to dying at once—after he was shot. And after that to dying in three months—w*ee*thering away—dying by inches. But now there *is* a chance, he may live to be old. But he can never ride again—or walk much, I fear. He will always be invalid. . . . For the present he must stop here till the back mends enough. . . . Perhaps a month. . . . Are you reech?"

"Well—er——" replied the dishevelled Mervyn, whose thoughts for the moment rested only on himself—it must have been a week since he had taken off his clothes or had a bath, and so long since he had shaved that he had better now shave no more till he reached home and Elizabeth. "Well, I shouldn't say *rich,* out here; still in my brother's case I should not look too closely into expenditure if only, *if only* I could save him, could get him cured. Do you think he will recover?"

"Yes, I do. But always afterwards to be invalid. But to get him well enough to leave here in a month you must do much. You must move some of these Boers. . . . I will talk to Mevrouw and see what she can do. She is a kind woman. You must have a trained nurse—from Potchefstroom—I will send one out in a cart. . . . She shall be either German or English. . . . This is a wretched place in which to nurse him, but good climate. He cannot be moved—yet—or he will die. So he must be nursed here. It is all right if you have money——"

"Oh, there's no bother about the money. . . . But I'm still in a kind of dream, in a nightmare. What *has* happened? I was in Bechuanaland on December 30, on my way back to Cape Town where I live, where my wife is. This is her brother. Some months ago he

was an officer commanding at Fort Tuli, in Mashonaland. I was collecting plants near Victoria. On my way back I hear that this brother-in-law has accompanied Dr. Jameson into the Transvaal. I turn off to follow him up. I am stopped at a small river and made to wait, and whilst there my brother-in-law is brought back on a horse, wounded like you see, with a Zulu servant in charge of him. Has there been fighting? *What* has happened? It's all like a ghastly dream."

"Well, there has been fighting, and all your Dr. Jameson's troop was taken prisoner—to Pretoria. . . . There they will be tried. . . . That is no business of mine, though I strongly disapprove of Dr. Jameson. I suppose this gentleman here was with him?"

"I suppose he was. But what can I do? I can't leave him—at present. If the Boers come to arrest him, it will kill him to be moved——"

"My dear sir—for the present do nothing. If 'Zarps' come here to arrest him, give them this card of mine. . . . No, stay; before I go I will write a letter. You shall give it them, if they come. . . . And your own name—it is a Dutch one, Van Eering?"

"No, not exactly. My people may have come from Flanders centuries ago, but they have been in England something like two hundred years. Still, strange to say, my father and mother settled in France and my mother now spells her name as you pronounce it. But I spell mine thus——"—and he took a card from his note case in his pocket, and added: "I am a partner in the firm of Harmon, Veneering, the drug merchants, but at present I am living with my wife at Table Mountain studying the medical flora of South Africa."

"Harmon, Veneering? Why, I know their medicines well, often use them. . . . *Wonderful* — truly wonderful, now, that I should meet you, in an obscure part of the Transvaal!"

Three days afterwards the nurse chosen by Dr. Christophsohn arrived from Potchefstroom in a Cape cart, and brought with her a host of necessary things which the doctor, reasurred at Mervyn's name and connections, had paid for. As soon as she was well established at the Willow farm, Mervyn drove down to Potchefstroom in his own cart with the mules restored to vigour. He had an account from his Cape Town bank opened at its Potchefstroom branch, had his hair cut, called on Dr. Christophsohn, stayed the night at his house, and started the next morning to drive back to the Willow farm up the valley of the Mooi River. Before going, however, he had despatched a telegram to Elizabeth at Trelawney Villa, to this effect:

"Cable mother England saying Reggie and I Southern Transvaal all right. Am soon returning to you.—Mervyn."

The real state of the case could be told in letters. This, at any rate, with the news that must now be raging through England, would save them anxiety. For himself he purchased numerous books from a library and such choicer provisions as could be obtained; for his own stock in his Cape cart was getting very low, and the indigenous fare at the Veehoeders' was rough and elementary, though it included that supreme boon, milk, in abundance. He also took back with him a cheque-book on the Potchefstroom bank and fifty pounds in notes.

Soon after his return to Wilgenbosch and the inquiries about Reggie's condition from the nurse, he sought out Mrs. Veehoeder and placed in her hand an envelope containing fifty pounds in five-pound notes. She looked through the little bundle of ten crisp notes with something like amazement, perhaps at first not quite grasping their value; then, when he explained in the best Afrikaansch he could muster that it was to go

towards the expenses, and to console her for the upset in her home, she gave way to a mixture of tears and laughter, moderated in its vehemence by precautions as to not waking the patient—often and so long asleep—or angering the rather stern-looking hospital nurse. "I took him in because I liked your face," she explained in Cape Dutch, "and because my heart is always soft towards men that have been hurt. I guess now that he was one of the Engelschmans who came in here to join Johannesburg against Pretoria and worry Oom Paul. But there! Men are *always* fighting against some one or something. If the Zarps want him they must come and take him! Ik zal niets zeggen!"

"He is my 'schoonbroeder,'" explained Mervyn, "my wife's brother. He may have been fighting Kruger's people outside Johannesburg; I cannot say, for he has been too ill to talk to me; all I know is that I have *not,* and that I found him on his horse on the veld, alone with his Matabele servant. The whole thing has seemed a miracle to me. For myself, I was returning from a far country beyond the Limpopo, and not fighting anybody. What I have given you is very little. You have had to send your daughters away to live in some other house. We have put you to great trouble and wasted your time; but if only my dear schoonbroeder recovers, and I can take him to my home on the Tafelberg, I shall give you more money and shall never forget your kindness."

Then he staggered—for he was very tired and stiff—into Reggie's room. A faint voice came from the bed where the wounded man lay. It thrilled him for it was Reggie speaking, intelligibly—something to the effect of "That you, Mervyn? I've been going through a ghastly time. . . . Can't quite recollect what has happened or how I come not to be dead. . . . Or perhaps I *am* dead and you are too."

"No, old chap," replied his brother-in-law, so bursting with sudden happiness that he added, "Thank God! You're *not* dead nor am I, and you're going to get better and going home—*home*—think of it! *England!* . . . with me, with us—Elizabeth and Cecil. . . . All in good time. But you've had a devilish nasty wound, one very bad one in the back and a number of slight ones in front; but fortunately the bullets went out after coming in, so there's had to be no probing. Patience now, and everything will heal. . . . *Then* we'll travel gently home to Table Mountain, and after that to England. You're in a Boer farmhouse, a day's journey from Potchefstroom, and here you've got to stop on your back, till you're healed enough to travel by rail to Cape Town. We've got an excellent nurse for you, and a rattling good doctor from Potchefstroom, and I'm only just back thence. Had to drive in there to send word home by telegram, don't you know, and get some things for you and me to eat. Now you must be a good boy and do exactly as you're told by Nurse——" he effected a bow towards the figure shown up by candle light—the figure supplied the forgotten name—Gräfenstein—"Nurse *Gräfenstein,* and as soon as the back permits, we'll make a start for the railway and Elizabeth; and afterwards for HOME."

There was no doubt about the "home" he meant this time. Somehow, in a moment, South Africa had become hateful and foreign to him. *Strophanthus* could go to the devil, and *Anacampseros* likewise. Hang it all! One must think of oneself sometimes. Drugs were all very well, but Humanity was damned ungrateful. To him, as to so many others about that time, the Jameson Raid quite illogically snapped the ties of interest in Trans-Zambezia. He became suddenly sick of these eighty years' wrangles between Boer and Briton, Jew and German, Hottentot and

Kafir. Hang the gold, to hell with the diamonds! Pish for the coal, pooh for the wool, yah-bah for the jam and the fruits, the wine and the sugar. Memories came over him of Cape politicians—unlovely, untidy men, gross of appetite, wine-bibbers and whiskey drinkers, of appalling ignorance concerning science, biology, languages, manners, music, literature. He suddenly hated South African mountains with bare precipices and flat, treeless tops, South African broiling sunshine and bitter cold nights, South African fleas, mosquitoes, locusts, flies, and ants; the baldness of it, the blazing daylight, the prickly pear, the wait-a-bit thorns, the endless distance with grass tufts repeated by the million so far as eyesight could discriminate, the artificial look of the planted trees, the callow cold-heartedness of the accursed corrugated iron.

Before these bitter thoughts had spent themselves and unseen tears had welled up in tired eyes, Reggie had feebly thanked him and sunk once more into healing slumber. Mervyn pulled himself together and spoke nicely to the German-South-African nurse. Then he returned to his upstairs room, threw open its window, lit a lamp, glanced at his store of new books, and heaved a sigh of relief, undressed into pyjamas and an easy coat and mosquito-proof stockings, ate the soup and jam and dumplings which Mrs. Veehoeder presently brought in; and by nine o'clock dropped off to sleep with his pipe in one hand. Mrs. Veehoeder came in, not too noisily, took away the plate and dish and pipe, extinguished the lamp, and he never woke till the nurse called him at five the next morning.

* * * * *

Well, about the middle of February in that year, Reggie was sufficiently healed for the Cape Town journey to be attempted. They bade farewell with real regret to the kindly Veehoeders, who, when all expenses had been refunded and outlay made good, must

have realised quite one hundred pounds out of the shelter afforded to the wounded man, and were touchingly grateful for the money. Nurse Gräfenstein accompanied the two men to Trelawney Villa with several halts by the way—in fact they took about ten days over the journey. Here she stayed on, not only to give attention to Captain Harmon, but later to assist in seeing Elizabeth through her accouchement, which took place in March.

Elizabeth gave birth to another boy, and it was decided to name it "John Mervyn." Reggie was to be one of its unorthodox godfathers. His brother, John Junior, by now a fellow of his college, was to be the other, and would be informed of that by letter, while Mervyn, at the baptism, deputised for him. John might also assume that the first of the two names bestowed on the infant was his, though in reality it was his father whom Mervyn and Elizabeth had in mind, Reggie having, in the bitterness of his broken life, declined any perpetuation of his own unlucky name.

Elizabeth did not recover from her second confinement as quickly as she had done from the first; and Cecil was such a sturdy, opinionated child that he required the exclusive attention of the soldier's-widow-nurse. So Miss Gräfenstein, who had stayed on and on, helping Reggie to mend, and assisting to repair Elizabeth, agreed to go with her to England. They did not start till the beginning of May. They were met at Plymouth by John and Bella and left the steamer there. After three years' absence, England seemed to Mervyn, Reggie, and Elizabeth an earthly paradise; to Nurse Gräfenstein, who had never previously been outside South Africa, it was such a vision of beauty and decorum and Nature brought under restraint, that it came near to upsetting her admirably arranged and controlled disposition. She felt she could never go back to South Africa, and in fact—so far as I can find

out—never did. She remained for some months with Mrs. Harmon to assist in looking after Reggie, and when Reggie—always rather a cripple—grew tolerably well, she went over to see Hannover, near which place her unmigrated German relatives lived.

CHAPTER XX

1896-1899

AS I explained, or intended to explain, some time ago, the last century really ended in 1894 and the twentieth period began in 1895 with a crowd of new or first-hazarded inventions. We feel less estranged from the people who moved about civilised capitals in 1896 because, if they were curious in such matters, they might have seen electric broughams and the first motor cars and motor cycles in two or three of the greatest cities of Western Europe. Such advances were rendered possible, not only by a better understanding of petrol and electricity, but most of all, like the safety bicycle, by that invention of Dunlop's, the pneumatic tyre.

Mervyn and Elizabeth had returned to a greatly advanced England, when they had been able to take stock of their surroundings at Chacely, in the beginning of June, 1896. Every one—every man, at any rate—between the ages of fifteen and sixty seemed to be riding a bicycle. Many girls and young women also rode, and looked neither to right nor left as they passed this man of thirty-four and this woman of twenty-six, both bewildered, yet in ecstasies, over the changes three years had wrought in their own land. Of course, they had seen pictures and indications of these new inventions in the English papers, and, as a matter of fact, numerous boys of coloured mixture in Cape Town, an occasional young officer in civil garb, or even an adven-

turous *aide-de-camp* attending on the Governor had ridden bicycles and tricycles with pneumatic tyres in and around Cape Town. And the bicycle, in some shape or form, had been known since the 'sixties, as an eccentric means of locomotion.

But now it was and had been, since 1894, of universal application in the Homeland. The old bone-shaker had abruptly disappeared; and the thick-tyred, equal-sized wheels of the Dunlop type everywhere met the eye. Motor carriages to be moved by electricity, or "gasoline," or some other form of petrol, were being manufactured in haste, the law forbidding the use of a horseless carriage on roads (save at a rate not exceeding four miles an hour and preceded by a man with a red flag) having been abrogated.

Mervyn and Elizabeth felt they had come to a new England, and were avid of further reforms and enlargements. Would it—could it—be possible that marriage with a deceased wife's sister might become legal that year through action in both Houses of Parliament? But *no*. Even while they stayed—rejoicing, expanding, talking, smiling—at Chacely, it became certain that the Bill, passed by a majority headed by princes in the House of Lords, would never, under the existing, ruling party be admitted into the House of Commons. Eighteen bishops had voted against it! And Canon Milvey evidently felt very uncomfortable in meeting Mervyn and his wife at Chacely. His wife, to take off the chilling effect of his reserve, was almost effusive; so that the presence there of Mervyn, Elizabeth, and their babies seemed to be bringing discord into an absolutely blameless household.

It was decided between them, in private bedroom conferences, that if Madison and Helen were agreeable to the idea—as Helen certainly seemed to be—the Mervyn household and Hetty should take up their abode in Wigmore Street in the autumn. Madison

would then be able to pay an autumn visit to his parents in New York, and Helen and her children could have a good long stay at Chacely. Meantime, if one or other of them went away, it would make things easier. Mervyn, out of decency and affection, must go to see his mother at Pau; and he had a lot to talk over with Gaston about the Pyrenees plantations and the French company.

Mrs. Harmon was so transported with delight at getting her son Reggie back from the dead, the utterly lost; and having him returned in such an amenable condition, even with a badly injured back, that all projects proposed by her children seemed acceptable. Her husband, though he did not say much, even to Mervyn, felt the latter had repaid him fully for his own help and backing. Beside these mounds of affection, how trivial seemed the beginning of disapproval in the outer world at Mervyn having married—"if you could *call* it 'married'!"—his deceased wife's sister! Yet the lurking disapproval was there and made itself most disagreeably manifest in the coldness and silent disapproval of Canon Milvey.

Lady Feenix, of course, was in favour of your marrying anything beyond the limit of a mere first cousin, of your doing anything which led to the production of healthy, well-grown children, was desired by both parties, and was not actual polygamy. She had, like all who knew her, deplored the death of Mervyn's first wife, and really thought, under all the circumstances, there was no more suitable second wife and mother to little Hetty than Elizabeth; and that in going out to South Africa to be married and in afterwards living there in exile for three years, they had done all in delicacy that their most fastidious friends in England could have expected; and as to what your *un*friends thought and said, why nothing you could do satisfied *them*. So Suzanne made haste to invite Mer-

vyn and Elizabeth to lunch, any day they liked, before Mervyn left Chacely. It was probably a mere accident that the day they chose happened to be an occasion when Lord Feenix had to be up in Town. His absence made the visit to Deerhurst altogether delightful. They stayed on after lunch and played tennis and then had tea, and then Suzanne said, "Why not an *early* dinner? There's no one coming to-night, and we'll none of us 'dress,' and there's a moon, and you can drive home by moonlight." It was all so delightful, and Lady Feenix was so understanding and wise she might have been a nice, lesser goddess of early Greece; so they stayed, and Elizabeth did not see her second babe till midnight. However, the nurse thought for once the recourse to the nursing milk—a patent of Harmon, Veneering and Co.—might not be a bad thing—just as a change, and later—for John Mervyn—say once a week—a hint of the eventual weaning.

By the middle of June Mervyn had transferred himself to Wigmore Street for the overhauling of things in London. He paid a perfunctory and none too agreeable visit to Lavvy and George. Lavvy, on principle, she said, though no one could get her to define the principle—disapproved of his second marriage, and even expressed a doubt whether she could receive her niece when she came to London—Fulham was so *very* particular because the Bishop of London lived there; and George was a churchwarden at St. Saviour's.

In two days after leaving London, Mervyn was at Pau, seeing his mother. Here the atmosphere was altogether different from Fulham. His mother, in the Rue Henri Quatre, sighed a good deal, and rattled her keys, but her sigh was not particularly indicative of grief, only a vague commentary on the fact that he had passed more than three years entirely separated from her, and involved intricately in the affairs of many persons she did not know. The rattling of the keys

was sub-conscious, and if it indicated anything, merely showed that she was quite satisfied in these later days with her domestic arrangements and a presumption of mastery over her household of two efficient servants. Only two out of the bunch of keys opened any lock in use, and those were in cabinets so often resorted to that they were usually left unlocked. If questioned—which, of course, would never occur—she would have said that the bunch of keys was merely a symbol which she held for a short time every morning after breakfast.

As regards Mervyn's trouble over his deceased wife's sister, she pointed out that if he and she would only join the Church of Rome, the whole matter could be simplified; for in that Church the little difficulty was regarded as trivial and easily dispensed with by a Papal dispensation. Rome, she pointed out, kept the Scriptures in their proper places, and did not allow Exodus or Leviticus to press uncomfortably on modern people's lives.

His brother Lance was a parish priest at Orthez. He saw a good deal of the Bishop of Bayonne, and Madame Van Eering once again expressed her indebtedness to Mervyn for his intervention in Lance's affairs. Herein something of the real woman, of the old "Mrs. Veneering," showed itself. For the rest, her son computed her age at about sixty-two. Her finances had remained undisturbed since his last intervention, the re-spelling of the name—Van Eering—seemed, together with her Catholicism, to make her so happy and satisfied with life: why disturb either illusion?

Three days were spent punctiliously over his mother and her affairs, and one afternoon was surrendered to a meeting with Lance, who came over from Orthez for the purpose. He insisted on talking French only, pretexting that he had begun to forget English. Mervyn, on the other hand, found that three and a half years'

absence from France, most of it in a South Africa which was singularly out of touch with the French language, had considerably affected *his* fluency. However, he was polite and avoided subjects of animated discussion.

At the close of three days' filial duties he was beginning to feel both perturbed and piqued at the silence from the villa—Mme. de Lamelle's residence—and from Oloron, where Jeanne and Gaston were now living, Jeanne's large family having greatly abstracted her interest and attention from the plantations. Then, on mentioning his anxiety as to their silence to his mother, she suddenly remembered her having failed—"*totally forgotten*"—to let them know of his return. She would write at once. But he stopped her. "It will be greater fun taking them by surprise. Besides, I can do everything more deliberately."

So on the afternoon of the fourth day—a Sunday—he drove out to the Villa Cyrnos, and announced himself. A nice-looking housemaid opened the door. "Oui. Madame de Lamelle et Miss Podes-nap reçoivent cette après-midi. Si Monsieur laissera son chapeau ici il en sera moins encombré dans le salon." He enters a rather floridly, somewhat gorgeously furnished drawing-room. "Georgy's taste," he says to himself, smiling, and has scarcely finished the remark than Georgy is upon him—affection, agitation, surprise, making her quite young and agile. Her greeting is so warm, so full of affection that she nearly kisses him, but remembers in time Sophie's lectures about self-restraint at this dangerous, intermediate stage in her life. But before the eager welcome is dimmed in her affectionate eyes, Mme. de Lamelle herself comes in, a little majestically, and plying a rubber-feruled ebony stick as a precaution against slipping. Her back is a *little* bowed, her hair is quite white, but she is a majestic old lady, though it occurs to Mervyn in a rapid

thought-flash that he never thought of her as an "old" lady before.

"My *dear* Mervyn," she says, in a voice which has a quaver from emotion, "*what* a delightful surprise! *How* truly glad we are—both—to see you. I had begun to fear it would be 'never again' in my case. D'you know I am seventy-five? We heard a rumour that you and your wife were back, but it was only a rumour—from Jeanne, who had heard it from Lance, who in an uncomfortable way seems to know everything that is going on. To keep ourselves abreast of him, we have to pretend we also know. . . . But I *am* glad! . . . I so feared at times I should die before I saw you again."

Her fine dark eyes were actually full of tears as she spoke. But the tears did not fall. They were gradually absorbed, leaving the eyes quite bright and young, in contrast with the finely-wrinkled face.

"Come and sit next me! Georgy, pet, would you tell the household to prepare an unusually gorgeous tea and also to say 'not at home' to any callers? We won't have this memorable occasion spoilt by any local triviality."

Before Georgy could reach the maid and deliver her message there was a clamour of voices outside, the door flew open and in sailed Jeanne. Mervyn and she were locked in each other's arms for a minute; then she held him back for a moment by the arms, winked her eyes to baffle the tears, and kissed him solemnly on each cheek; looked again; and detaching herself, dabbed her eyes with a filmy handkerchief, and sank into a gorgeously upholstered chair near by.

"You dear, *dear* boy. Why—*why* on earth steal suddenly into our midst like this? I heard this morning from Lance about a Church matter, and at the end of his letter he said: 'I suppose you know Mervyn is back from South Africa, staying with mother!' I

ordered the victoria, drove round to the station, caught the one o'clock train to Pau, flew to mother's house—I think I was too much in a hurry to look for a carriage. But she was quite tranquil, with her keys, and told me you had probably come on here. *What* an excitement it has been! My elder children must be thinking all sorts of things have happened. Gaston is away at Prades, but I have telegraphed to him. You dear, *dear* boy! And where is Elizabeth? Have you left her behind?"

"Elizabeth is absolutely demobilised by her babies, so I left her at Chacely; spent a fortnight looking into affairs at Mincing Lane, and then came on to mother's house at Pau. I suppose I ought to have written and telegraphed. Perhaps I did; perhaps I forgot. You've heard all about Reggie, I imagine?"

"Scarcely anything. I suppose he's alive?"

"Quite. Well: that shall all be told to you in good time. Now, here I am: till our dear friend here feels tired. She must tell us when she does, and I'll go away. I'm going to make myself quite at home, if she'll let me?" (Mme. de Lamelle patted his hand to confirm this liberty of action.) "Consequently, I'll go out and pay my driver and do the same by yours, Jeanne. And then we'll stay till I've told you all most things you want to know? What time does the last train go to Oloron from Pau?"

"Nine-thirty."

(To Mme. de Lamelle): "May she stay here till nine?"

"Of course she may, you ridiculous boy, or sleep the night, and you too. . . . I dare say we could lend you night-gowns."

"No, we need not go so far as that. She has her children to look after, and later on I'm coming here *en régle* to stay with you. Very well, I'll go outside and settle."

"Then, when you come back you will find us in the library. It is far cooler there in the afternoon. And as to the evening . . . though on Sundays we give a holiday as much as possible to our coachman, we'll send word to the stables and he shall drive you into Pau at nine o'clock."

Three days afterwards Gaston broke tempestuously into the quiet of the Rue Henri Quatre, kissed Mervyn on both cheeks, wrung his hands, and in eye-glances and accent testified to the sincerity of his affection and the reality of his delight at getting him back.

They started soon afterwards, despite the heat of mid-day, for a visit to the Gave d'Aspe, a three days' tour; and after the return there was a meeting of the French directorate at Pau at the company's office in the Rue Gassies. One or two of the directors had not hitherto met Mervyn, and only knew by report that he was "une espèce d'Anglais, *assez* charmant, intelligent, *mais*——"

The "mais" and the unfinished phrase might cover anything, and in those days, at the end of the nineteenth century, French suspicions of English personalities had become positively morbid, though perhaps less acute in the Pyrenees by reason of the events of 1814, which had left long-lasting impressions. Mervyn had only put in an appearance once or twice before this Pyrenean Board after the separate constitution of the company, so it was just as well now that the situation should be faced and pleasant relations be established. He felt inwardly a little bit nervous, but five minutes in the board-room dispelled that feeling. His French came back, provoked by their French; the directors were, as a matter of fact, charming men of middle age or early, ripe old age, with a sense of humour and considerable experience of the world outside France. They affected to excuse themselves for a rapid surrender to Mervyn's

charm by the insinuation that "somme toute, vous êtes Flamand, Monsieur, n'est-ce pas?"

But Mervyn would have none of that. "I won't swear my family, like a thousand others in England, may not have come, centuries ago, from Belgium or from France, but otherwise I am thoroughly English. It pleases my mother—and hurts no one else—that she should spell her name as if it were Flemish; and for reasons of strong affection for France she chooses to reside in Pau, as do so many other English women. *I* had the advantage of living in France till I was eighteen, and I shall always love your country almost equally with my own. But if you want *la vérité vraie*, I am English on both sides."

His eye glittered a little as he said this; but they then passed to business, and he showed himself so apt in suggestion, so amusing in diction that they accepted him as a friend as well as a colleague. After all, he was undoubtedly the brother of that most charming lady, Madame Dudeffrand, with whom they one and all professed themselves still in love.

These French plantations were doing well, paying an annual dividend round about eight per cent. So huge was becoming the demand for their medicines in France and the enormous French possessions in Africa and Indo-China, that the produce of the gardens—seeds, leaves, roots, bark, sap—was manufactured by the company itself into tablets, pillules, liqueurs, powders, at factories on the Agly River near Perpignan. Thence the products could be sent for shipment to Port Vendres or to Marseille.

Mervyn, after a month of inspection of all the developments which had taken place in plantations and manufactories, said—not good-bye, a word he hated with those whom he liked, but—"to the seeing again," "au revoir" to mother and sister, to Gaston his guide

(his brother, he really felt); to Sophie de Lamelle—now just a little tremulous where her affections were concerned; to Georgy, to Lancelot, and to Jeanne's children; and transferred himself to Bayonne to spend part of the day with the bishop of that place, partly to see if it were the same bishop, and if so, to thank him for what had been done for Lancelot.

It was the same bishop, and he did not look very different after four years, nor was he any less suave. His wit played with gentle malice round the unbeliever. "*Si* je vous reconnais!" he exclaimed, "vous n'êtes pas de ceux qu'on oublie facilement ni volontairement! And your brother? You are content with what we have done for him?"

"So content, indeed, that I felt I could not leave France without calling to thank you, Monseigneur."

"That is charmingly said. Your brother has qualities, has learning, mais il n'est pas de votre pâte. He has not your charm. However, I hope he will be content to follow the much safer road I have indicated to him. What a pity *you* are English and a heretic, or even worse than a mere heretic . . . an absolute unbeliever, I fear. However—I expect le bon Dieu knows what he is doing; he has marked out some path for you to follow. . . . You will stay and breakfast with us, is not that so? I want to talk to you about Africa."

About five o'clock that afternoon, Mervyn, having left the bishop's palace and crossed the Nive, and after that the broad Adour in the bishop's magnificent but old-fashioned carriage, had himself put down outside the Gare du Midi. Then and there, before committing himself to a through ticket to Paris and London, he decided first to walk along the quays and look at the shipping. Among the vessels was an English steamer of not much more than a thousand tons, one of a line

that plied up and down the west coast of France to San Sebastian in Spain, and thence, on the return, to Plymouth and London. Its second officer, with a blunt but comely English face, was arguing on the quay with some Basque sailors. His French was appalling and beyond their comprehension. Mervyn, without impertinence, drew near and listened, and finally ventured an explanation of his meaning which both sides took in the best humour. The Basques, satisfied, strolled away; the mate hesitated, then said—he did not quite know why—"Like to look over the ship, sir?" Mervyn said he would—there were still two hours of daylight ahead. The vessel did not bother much about passengers—took six first-class, in cabins which were spotlessly clean, if not spacious. "You take a week to reach Plymouth, calling at Bordeaux, La Rochelle, and Nantes? How much is it, first-class? Three pounds? I'll come with you if you are starting to-morrow."

He did not regret the adventure. There were no other passengers, at any rate in the first-class, the three officers were of that truly excellent breed of the seafaring middle class which we, more than any other nation, seem to generate; they would never be able to speak intelligibly any language but English, yet they might, by the age of twenty-five, have steamed through all navigable seas, have visited the coasts of New Guinea or Alaska, East Africa, and Patagonia, have picked up masses of the most interesting information which, if not elicited by a sympathetic questioner, would die with them; they smoked in moderation, drank of alcohol even more moderately, had good teeth, good digestions, merry laughs, married early, and were good husbands. His week's voyage with them taught him a lot that was worth knowing; they, on their part, learnt a good deal from Mervyn. From this voyage there germinated a scheme which went far to influence the policy of Harmon, Veneering and Co.

—the concentration of much of their drug manufacture in Devonshire, near Plymouth; the cultivation of drug plants in the Pyrenees under the French company; English steamers from Bayonne to Plymouth conveying the produce of the Pyrenean plantations to be manufactured in England and exported all over the world. There would have to be other plantations of drug-plants in India, Africa, and tropical America for such things as wanted hotter sunshine than they could get in the Pyrenees and absolutely no lower winter temperature than fifty-five degrees, not even a near approach to a frost. But the greater part of the plants required for medicine could be grown at the base or on the lower slopes of this chain of mountains separating France and Spain, and the water journey between this region and Devonshire was trivial compared with the thousands of miles which separated manufacturing England from any part of the tropics.

Mervyn's realisation of this need for a close co-operation in the production of world-healing vegetable drugs between south-western France and western England was quickly shared by John Harmon. The expensive railway transport of drug materials between the Pyrenees, Calais, and London was given up in favour of the sea-route between Bayonne and Plymouth. It was decided, when a favourable opportunity offered, that the offices and show-rooms of Mincing Lane should be given up in favour of offices and show-rooms in Wigmore Street. No. 38, Mincing Lane had become so valuable for other purposes that a considerable profit should result from its sale, and the transfer of the company's London activities westward; enough, almost, to cover the cost of the transference or creation of factories in the vicinity of Plymouth.

By October, 1896, Mervyn and Elizabeth were established in Wigmore Street with Hetty. Hetty was get-

ting on for seven, but now that she had two baby brothers she did not feel quite so grown up—with the elder of them she was even inclined to romp. Ungratefully enough, she did not now miss Chacely as she ought to have done. She enjoyed Hyde Park, its water and swans, its horses, extraordinary people, soldiers, and boats rather more than she had appreciated the woods and fens, gardens, and hothouses of Chacely. There was the excitement of crossing Oxford Street, there were the shops of Regent Street and Bond Street. The most vivid of all her desires at this period, and one easily and economically satisfied, was to ride on the outside of the smart new omnibuses. There was the thrill of making purchases at the Army and Navy Stores, and the delight—inexpressible in language at her command—of taking tea or lunch with Mrs. Cochrane at her delightful flat in Buckingham Street. In fine weather they had their tea on a balcony which overlooked the river.

Miriam, after her marriage, had undergone a spell of disenchantment with the stage and with great cities. She had preferred an ideally quiet home in the southwest of the Isle of Wight, not far from the wild coast and its pinnacles and crags of chalk, its coastguard stations, and its sights of ships, large and small, passing on tiny trips across the Solent or on solemn voyages of thousands of miles. But after the birth of her baby girl, Myra—a name without purport other than that it shared her initial—and partly in view of Victor's determination to get into the House of Commons for an Isle of Wight constituency, she consented to a home in London for part of the year.

In her sentimental moods, she reverted in thought to her first days of struggle and the vivid life she led at the last house in Villiers Street . . . Mervyn . . . Harry Sanders . . . Emilio Ratti . . . Edith Pallard . . . Lewis Henslake—theatre jabber and excitement,

tears at disappointments, glowing cheeks when great successes came—the mystery of countrylike simplicity in these garden nooks round the Water Porch, the poplars, aspens, sycamores, sumaches, and planes; the ruffianism in the tunnels below Adelphi Terrace, modified by police protection for all respectable and well-dressed persons; the river night and day, the steamers, the distant factories of the Surrey side, the smug affluence of Adelphi Terrace. . . . Villiers Street, of course, was too noisy, too public, too rowdy. But Buckingham Street—the house where Samuel Pepys and Robert Harley, Earl of Oxford, had lived. . . .

She made inquiries from old acquaintances; she watched her opportunity; and at length, after a year's waiting, secured the first and second floors of this house on the river side of Buckingham Street. It joined the wall of the last house in Villiers Street in which she had formerly lodged, and overlooked the Embankment Gardens . . . overlooked them intimately. The river coursed east and west, according to the tides, beyond the tree growth and the gardens. Their bedroom and sitting-room looked out over the Embankment and the river. In addition, they had a dressing-room for Victor, a bathroom, and a small dining-room. On the floor above there were rooms which could be turned into a large day-nursery, sleeping accommodation for the nurse and the child, a bathroom and a housemaid's bedroom. Cochrane's manservant attended daily, and did much of the waiting. The ground floor was let as a solicitor's offices. The "people of the house" were a retired sergeant-major, his wife, who did the cooking, his two daughters, and two general servants. They had the topmost floor and the basement, which, though below the level of Buckingham Street, was above that of the gardens.

To Victor, this accommodation, at any rate for the present, was quite convenient. They entertained, when

they had to do so, at the restaurants most in vogue, or he gave dinners at his club. Buckingham Street was near Waterloo—for the Isle of Wight—and near the House of Commons which he yearned to enter, and St. Stephen's Club, to which he had already been elected, and the theatres, which he visited with the eye of a connoisseur and as a friend of all the managers.

Miriam knew that one reason for the attractiveness of Buckingham Street was not only the presence hard by of the Joseph Pennells and the Bernard Shaws, who were friends of hers, but the associations of the early 'eighties with Mervyn. Their rooms virtually abutted on No. 19, Villiers Street, though that building had been considerably changed since the departure of the Fairbairns. She had, from her bedroom, nearly the same "look-out" as from the bedroom of those days of struggle, and the remembrance of her comradeship with this handsome boy lent a tenderness to her recollections, and a spice, a merriment now to the welcoming of his child and wife when they came to call.

Elizabeth, so far—the late autumn of 1896—had not suffered much from ostracism or social exclusion. Her servants mostly came to her from the Chacely neighbourhood, where nothing—not even polygamy—could have affected the good name of the Harmons. Chacely, indeed, had always rather isolated itself in Gloucestershire society, and knew very little of its neighbours, save at Deerhurst. The theatrical world, with such an introducer as Miriam, welcomed such persons as Mervyn and Elizabeth solely on the ground of their being witty, amusing, discerning. It would have received them with glassy indifference had they been merely commended as respectable and law-abiding; and with good-humoured contempt and tolerance if they were nothing more than wealthy. City people were quite willing to know them in opulent suburbs or Surrey country houses; but the City, except on its

supreme Jewish or German summits, was dull, even though brightly coloured.

"I suppose we shall be made to wince here and there," said Elizabeth, discussing her fate with Miriam one day, in the approach to Christmas, '96. Miriam was preparing to leave for the Isle of Wight. Christmas and London fogs, Myra's health, and the proximity of a bye-election might make a long stay in the Island altogether necessary.

"But, curiously enough, very little that is *really* disagreeable has happened. I never, of course, cared very much for my Aunt Lavinia; in fact, it was difficult to realise that she was mother's sister. . . . I have still a very improper aunt . . . did you ever know? She went on the stage . . . Aunt Susan. At least, she had a variegated early life and married three times. But she afterwards became so successful on the stage."

"*My dear!* . . . I know all about her . . . *far* more than you do. Your husband interceded for her far back in the 'eighties, and I gave her a helping hand. She was so droll she became one of the successes of my company. She is a sort of 'succès de curiosité' nowadays, a bit of Roquefort cheese. I believe she's acting still, though she's quite comfortably off. . . . But about what you call your Aunt Lavvy——"

"Yes, Mrs. Sampson. She lives at Fulham. Her husband, a worthy creature, is one of our managers. Well, she has intimated that, after giving the subject *due* consideration, she thinks, while her girls are still young, I had better not come and see her. So I am relieved of the need for bicycling to Fulham. Do you bicycle, by the bye?"

"No; I don't. I tried privily, so to speak, at Shalcombe; but fell off, sprained my wrist, and decided I wouldn't bother about it. I'm getting a little bulky for such sprightliness. So's Victor. We're going to wait and see how these motor things develop; and if

they seem all right, buy ourselves something of that kind we can drive. Of course, Victor just now can think of nothing but getting into Parliament, and I can't think of much else but Myra—and you . . . and Mervyn. Well: I must be off. When you have got over your Christmas stay at Chacely you must come and see me at Shalcombe. You could bring your family and they could play with Myra. We've *heaps* of room!"

In the early part of the Jubilee year, 1897, Madison having returned from his visit to America, Harmon decided to discuss with him and Mervyn important questions regarding the future work of the firm. He laid before them a sound offer for the Mincing Lane premises, and advised its acceptance. The price offered would enable them to purchase, or, at any rate, secure on very long leases, the two houses in Wigmore Street next to No. 1. These could be adapted to be museums, show-rooms, and business premises for the firm in London, the London office. No. 1 might remain with some alterations and improvement the town residence of the family, at present to be shared by Mervyn and Madison and their respective families . . . the children of these families would spend much of the year with their grandparents at Chacely, and their parents be down there whenever they had the time. George Sampson and Ambrose Milvey should be raised to full partnership; the former should reside ordinarily at Plymouth, where Harmon proposed the creation of extensive factories to deal with the drug material imported from France and from all over the world.

"I have concluded a provisional agreement with our sister company in the Pyrenees, which Mervyn has negotiated and which I am now going to ask you to confirm. They will send us at least half their material, which we shall deal with chemically and transmute into

the finished medicine. Ambrose knows a great deal about the chemical and manufacturing side, and although, for the present, he will live ordinarily in Chacely village and look after our business in the gardens, he will be able, by the improved railway service, to run over easily to Plymouth and keep his eye on our export business and our manufactures, in conjunction with Sampson. I shall become a sleeping partner altogether, retire from any more work—if I am alive—in 1901. Mervyn will then become the head of the firm, and you will be next in seniority, Madison. Sampson and Milvey will receive twelve hundred a year each as director's fees, plus various living expenses and allowances, bringing their annual income up to two thousand pounds. Sampson has worked long enough to have earned this; Milvey merits it by his extraordinary ability. There remains the question of India, where our business is enormous but where we want a clear-headed report to enable us to decide on further developments and a better control. I am proposing we send out there, within a month, Fletcher Sampson. He is a very clever young man. . . . My chief objections to him, if I were asked to criticise, would be his manner of speaking and his facial appearance. He is so perky and so self-assured. I have never much liked his mother, but his father has been a truly faithful and unassuming servant of our firm, and has thoroughly deserved his partnership. India may do a lot of good to Fletcher. Two years' experience there may qualify him to become our Indian partner. Now, there's one other question I propose to touch on before we go west to lunch, and that is Rubber. The City is going mad about rubber owing to the enormous demand for the manufacture of tyres. Well, as a firm, we know a lot about rubber. I knew it, Mervyn knew it, Madison's people knew it years ago. The great sources of rubber in the future are going to be cultivated forms; the

wild rubber will soon be exhausted. The best of all the rubbers will be *Hevea* of Brazil, and you mark my words, they'll try to plant that everywhere in the well-watered tropics. Gigantic fortunes will be made and gigantic failures will occur. Well, my two dear sons-in-law, I vote we don't touch it. When I restarted this firm I did so quite half with a philanthropic motive, and I think philanthropy entered nearly as much into the projects of Madison's father and grandfather."

Victor Cochrane was elected as a Liberal Unionist for the Isle of Wight constituency to which I have alluded in April, 1897, at a cost of five thousand pounds. Many people said it was cheap, considering, in the Jubilee Year and in time to participate in the celebrations as a Member of Parliament.

Elizabeth had another son in the autumn of 1897, and a daughter in April, 1899. During these years she found that a few people whom she disliked and did not wish to know were very disagreeable about her "colonial" marriage and infraction of the mysterious inhibition of the Deceased Wife's Sister. But nobody she liked or wished to know cared two straws, showed any concern, or expressed any disapproval.

Lavvy Sampson was rather startled and upset when she learnt in March, 1897, that they were to move down to Plymouth, and was disposed to nag at George for having so humbly fallen in with the project, without consulting her, and just after they had got to know the new Bishop of London. But George for once withstood her. "Two thousand a year and a Devonshire climate are better than twelve hundred and the fogs of Fulham . . . and that's all there is to it, my dear." And her four daughters and clergyman son were all, for one reason and another, in favour of the move. Fletcher was cock-a-hoop over the Indian journey and the hint at a future partnership. You must

remember that incomes of twelve hundred to two thousand were worth having in those days, when the cost of living comfortably was half what it is now. So Lavvy was silenced and fades from my story, though I believe she lived to a very considerable age—may not even be dead yet.

Reggie Harmon eventually dispensed with a nurse or special attendant, and Miss Gräfenstein married a German pastor and settled somewhere near Hannover, and was quite happy (with occasional visits to Bella at Chacely) till the abominable war broke out. Reggie, in 1898, commenced work for the firm at the Chacely hothouses and seed-beds, which, at first taken up peevishly, became, in course of time, intensely interesting, though it had to be limited by his inability to do much standing or stooping. John junior only came to Chacely twice a year, lived the rest of the time at Oxford, and wrote fleshly poems and macabre plays. Canon Milvey continued to sorrow very much over Elizabeth and Mervyn down to the spring of 1898. Then he had just a slight stroke, which was never *called* a stroke by any one connected with the family—possibly a touch of influenza or facial rheumatism. But it drew to his side his second son, who became his curate and factotum. John Harmon had intimated to the latter that so soon as arrangements could be made for the retirement of the dear old man—who after his illness ceased to worry over the question of the Deceased Wife's Sister, and resumed his collection of Gloucestershire fungi—he would present him with the living.

And when the twentieth century opened with the death of Queen Victoria, John Harmon, retired from Parliament, became a sleeping partner in the firm. He had been knighted in 1900 for his great services to Medicine—to Humanity, the old Lord Wiltshire said; and the Press, not really knowing very much about

the subject, mildly approved. A peerage was given, at the same time, to a Tulse Hill gentleman who had made a million on the Stock Exchange out of the South African war and had given seventy thousand pounds to a soldiers' hospital; and a baronetcy to a Yorkshire squire, who had raced at Doncaster for twenty years and never given anything appreciable to any good cause, but had withdrawn from his seat to let an unfortunate seatless Minister re-enter Parliament.

CHAPTER XXI

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

IT was the first of January, of the first year—1901—of the twentieth century. The Christmas festivities at Chacely had been a little shortened, and Sir John Harmon had come up to town with Mervyn and spent a night or two at No. 1, Wigmore Street, before meeting the other directors of Harmon, Veneering and Co. in the new board-room of No. 3. He had called a special assembly of the directorate at eleven o'clock. They had breakfasted together at No. 1 and then had adjourned to their company's office next door. There were no other persons present than the five directors.

"The main reason for this special meeting of to-day is an open secret," said Sir John, taking the chair. "I have called you together, dear friends, to take leave of you as chairman. I retire to-day from active management in this firm. I had intended to take this step more or less on my seventieth birthday which still lies nine months ahead; but as I want to go away for a spell to warmer countries, and as a new century begins to-day, I thought I would take the step now. You know all the circumstances, so it is little else than a pleasant formality I am fulfilling. When it is done with I shall have become a sleeping partner in Harmon, Veneering and Co. . . . You are all so near and dear to me that I can call you by your Christian names. . . . I have always hated anything that seemed stagey; but I should like at this moment to say 'thank you, one and all.' . . . No man ever worked with better part-

ners. Mervyn, will you jot down essentials as we're doing without a secretary? Just something formal to enter in our books? . . . Well, then, you others, you realise that Mervyn Veneering succeeds me as chairman and senior partner; Madison stands next to him; then comes George, and lastly in seniority, Ambrose. I stress the point about seniority, because I am hoping Reggie, my son, will be able—if you are all agreed in wishing to have him—to join this board as its—what's the superlative of 'junior'? Don't think there was one! I mean its youngest, most juvenile partner. His health has of late greatly improved, and though he may not be able to stand much of London life—long train journeys upset him, jar him—he now takes an extraordinary interest in our Chacely greenhouses and gardens, and the cultivation of drugs on English soil. Of course, if he were well enough to do some of the supervision work at Chacely, that might release Ambrose for joint work at Plymouth with George.

"You will see, by the bye, in my two or three written proposals for discussion at the next board meeting, that I have suggested a gift of five hundred pounds to our colleague, Ambrose Milvey, as some return for the splendid work he did for our firm during his 1900 service with the forces in South Africa. Much as we have all regretted this South African war we must admit it has given an enormous expansion to our business. I reckon, when our accounts are all made up for 1900, we shall have made a profit on our medicines ordered by the War Office for this war, of over one hundred thousand pounds. And that, mind you, not out of fleecing the Government, as other purveyors have done, but just an honest return for our labours and experiments, in four continents since the end of the 'sixties. . . . Now I have said enough—I think—enough for business. But, of course, if any of you chaps want to ask questions and go further into

details . . . ? I only came into this room from the other house for the formality of resigning my position and installing Mervyn in my place. . . . I've a horror of votes of thanks. Please, *please,* don't propose any. . . . If Mervyn's finished his shorthand notes—do you know that chap had *actually learnt shorthand* by the time he was eighteen? *Isn't* he a marvel? *I* never could learn it. . . . Let's leave Mervyn here to finish his rescript and see it properly typed in longhand. Then, later on, we can have it entered in the books and sign it. Now then, let's get back to No. 1. I'm host for the rest of the day—at least till I depart for Chacely. I'm going down—all the way—in our new motor. Quite an adventure! Hundred and thirty-five miles, or something like it—fortunately there's a moon. I'm taking George to Paddington for Plymouth. He catches the three o'clock train. So we've got from now to two-forty to enjoy ourselves. I thought we'd take a run up to the Zoo while Mervyn does business, and start lunch at a quarter to one. . . . God bless you, dear old chaps! Good-bye as chairman! Don't say *one* word—or—or—you'll upset me——"

They motored to the Zoo. It was very cold there, but the brisk east wind dissipated any outward expression of sentimentality which was always John Harmon's dislike. The wind gave them red noses and blistered eyes and purplish complexions, but sharpened their appetites; and they returned blithely to Wigmore Street and proceeded to sit down to one of the best luncheons, in quality, given that day in London.

"Hul*lo,* Mr. Slopey, *you* here?" said Harmon, glancing round the dining-room as he entered.

"Yes, Sir John. It was pretty generally known in the office why you was up here, from Chacely, and I came along yesterday and saw Mr. Mervyn's cook and man-servant, and *they* both saw the point, and says

they was quite willin' I should come and wait on you all. . . . Let's hope *not* for the last time——"

"Shake!" said Harmon, shooting out his right hand. And the ex-chairman of the great drug company and the great hall porter of his office—now pensioned and only an occasional visitor—wrung each other's right hand before the former sat down at the head of the table and the latter applied himself to the service of the first dish. Harmon's eyes sparkled for a minute or two with unshed tears. He looked up half shyly at his partners entering the room. [The women and children of the joint household were still at Chacely, and there were only the five directors at the luncheon, two on each side of the presiding host. . . .] "'Gad, d'you realise we've got dear old Slopey as head-waiter to-day? Here!" (to footman), "James! Give us all some wine. . . . Sherry is best. . . . And before we start on the oysters, we'll all drink Slopey's health and long life. I just realise I've known him close on forty years."

Then the luncheon proceeded. They had oysters from Colchester, brown bread-and-butter and a glass of Chablis; soles, quite exceptional soles á l'Impératrice Eugénie, served with a glass of unbrandied sherry, specially imported; rump-steak à la financière (quite small pieces, but delicious), accompanied by laver and chip potatoes; then roast peacock, from Chacely, a male bird of the second year (peacocks are not full-grown till they are four years old) stuffed with Dean Forest chestnuts. [To those who know I need hardly say that just as the peacock surpasses all other game birds in coloration, so in texture and flavour of flesh it is the last word.] After this, glasses of mild punch were handed round. Then there came rose-cream ices. The flavouring, candied rose petals were from the attar-producing variety, and like the cream (from Jersey cows), came from Chacely.

Lastly there were blood oranges—an early consignment from Tunis—Mocha coffee, and green Chartreuse.

The servants withdrew. The diners smoked Russian cigarettes. Anything so gross as a cigar would have shattered the harmony. There was more than half an hour ahead before the train-goers need think of starting.

Some one spoke. . . . "And where and when are you beginning your holiday?"

"Next Wednesday," replied Harmon, "we start for Paris, spend a week there, if it isn't too cold or wet. Then to Pau; and see Mer's mother, the Lamelle and Georgy, and Gaston and Jeanne. And while mother stops with the Lamelle—who is a perfect wonder for eighty years of age—and may live to ninety—as I hope *you* all will, and I too, with the aid of our drugs, well, then I shall go up the Gave d'Aspe with Gaston and look at all the plantations. Afterwards we shall go on—mother and I—to Toulouse—Perpignan—Prades, and see the eastern section of the French company's grounds. When all that's done—pass the cigarettes—thanks!—we shall go off to Marseille—beastly place, but I know the Consul—and finally to Monte Carlo. At Monte we shall stay and gamble—and watch *them* gambling—great fun, and go to concerts and the theatre and eat meals in moderation at Ciro's, and take little trips to Mentone and Nice, p'raps even to Corsica, till the beginning of April. THEN we shall turn our eyes and our steps towards Chacely. . . . And now, George, we must put our wits together—I think it's twenty years since I drank so much wine!—and start for Paddington—and you all must try and get on without me till after Easter."

Fruitless attempts were made in 1901 and 1902 to amend the law in regard to marriage of a Deceased Wife's Sister; but under the opposition of the Brinsleys and their clan and party adherents, the House of

Commons became recalcitrant to the reform and showed itself again more circumscribed and less modern than the House of Lords.

Elizabeth Veneering refused to be either perturbed or put out. "We are legally married in South Africa, and, indeed, in most parts of the British Empire outside this dear, old-fashioned country. If the marriage were equally legal here, and Mervyn's disposition altered, he could still leave me and live separately and break my heart if he chose. The law can no longer force husbands and wives who have grown to hate each other to live together; and fortunately—also—it can no longer use force to prevent men and women who love one another from living together. Our children are embodiments of health and good looks, I am thankful to say. I shan't waste a penny of my own or of my husband's money trying to 'propagand'—what is the verb? You can't say trying to 'propagate' in that sense! Mer and I are quite happy and very content not to be able to know Mrs. Ogilvie-Smith and Lady Stepfield—who have announced that they will never call on us. . . . I can't think of any other penalty imposed on us. They don't refuse to admit me to the theatres or the Crystal Palace. . . . If there *is* punishment going on these occasions, it is always the *woman*, not the man, who is punished. Of course I'm left out of all Court and public invitations. That leaves me placid, because I have so much to do with the children. . . . We have both made our wills, so if we both die in an epidemic or a railway smash the dear children are all right for the little we have to leave——"

These were more the remarks that Elizabeth intended to make if any one like Aunt Lavvy directly questioned her position. But I am not aware that any one did, other than that fearless and disagreeable relative; now—fortunately—completely immersed in a struggle for position and respect at Plymouth.

Both Elizabeth and Mervyn were comfortably off then—twenty years ago—and I dare say now enjoy twice the income they did then, since the expenses of living have doubled, and yet they are living in the same style. Mervyn had invested most of his savings since 1887 in the company's capital, and received a steady 8 per cent. interest. His salary and his percentage on profits after he became chairman in 1901 probably rose to something like £3,000 a year. Elizabeth's and Hetty's money came to another £600 annually. The interest on Mervyn's savings must have brought up their annual income to £4,000 a year. They lived at the Wigmore Street house without paying rent. So that, although they had in course of time a family of six children (including Hetty) to feed, clothe, educate, and put out in the world, servants to pay, and a motor to run, they just managed to do all this within their means. But for the slur on Elizabeth and its consequent economy in dinner, dance, and Ascot dresses, they might have been in difficulties. Proximity to Cavendish Square in those days laid down certain standards of costume and head-gear with which you could not palter without damage to your reputation. Inclination in the trend of business further obliged them to become fellows—singly or doubly—of the Zoological, Royal Botanical, Linnæan and Royal Geographical Societies. The contributions they were expected to make to charities were not in the least affected by the illegality in England of Elizabeth's marriage. In the respect of a giver to Queen Charlotte's Lying-in Hospital, to the Bayswater Bacterial Institute, the Marylebone Prosectorium, the Great Portland Street curative institutions, the Kew Cottage Hospital for gardeners, she was recognized in the receipts as "Mrs. Veneering."

However, though much was expected of them as donors—and those who did not require their help were

keen to wound—they were very happy. Their children were healthy, handsome, and clever. So 1901 slid into 1902. We made peace in South Africa, and began to tackle the sleeping sickness problem between the Nile and the Zambezi basins. The Japanese and the Russians fought for the mastery over Eastern Asia. This caused a further enormous demand for medicine. Old Mr. Crabtree died at a most advanced age from a boating accident in Florida (he said as he was dying, "I know I wasn't going off with any disease"). Should Madison give up his English home and cross to America to preside eventually over a drug house of enormous power and importance? Madison decided he would abide by Harmon, Veneering and Co., and try to get naturalised a British subject and change his name to Harmon. So a mighty German-American group of Chicago and St. Louis bought up the business of Corness and Crabtree for about six million dollars (or perhaps it was more, and they paid the "more" in shares of the new venture). They kept the old title because of its vast popularity in the United States, and did not run the scheme on very different lines. Their special purview extended over Canada, the United States, and Mexico, where Harmon, Veneering and Co. engaged not to compete. Central America, the West Indies, and South America were left free for both to prosecute researches therein, to cultivate and export thence the raw materials for drugs and there to sell the finished products. Gradually it seemed as though Central America would pass to the United States firm; Colombia, Peru, Venezuela, Guiana and Chili to the English company; and Brazil and Argentina to the Société Droguiste des Pyrénées. In any case Harmon, Veneering and Co. had a greater or less share in the profits of the other two companies.

What were Dr. and Mrs. Corness to do? Their girls were married to United States Senators. Dr.

Corness was aged, in 1903 (when all this was settled), about 70. Mrs. Corness—who of late had called herself Crabtree-Corness—must have been sixty-five. Overcome all at once with Anglomania and a greater longing for the society of Madison and Helen, they came to England in 1903 on a long visit, and finally decided to live out the remainder of their lives in our land. . . . They must have had, with their inheritance from old Crabtree, close on a million pounds. The residue of this amount would be equally divided between their three children when they died, so that Madison might some day—unless the legacy duty goes up even beyond war-time limits—inherit from them two hundred to two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. But as they themselves objected to the legacy duty, and knew their children were at a time of life when it is a relief and a pleasure to spend money, they made, yearly, large gifts of their capital, only intending to stop at a sufficient minimum to secure themselves a comfortable, well-provided existence. As they diet themselves most carefully and at the least sign of trouble take Harmon-Veneering tablets, I have not yet heard of their decease.

As to Madison, when his parents left America and finally settled down in England, he yearned to identify himself further with his father-in-law. So, in 1904, he added the maiden name of his wife to his own, and was ever afterwards "Madison Corness-Harmon," This would be very appropriate if he ever succeeded Mervyn in the headship of the firm.

And Madame de Lamelle—Sophronia Akershem of 1860, Sophie Lammle of 1865—what became of her? She died on June 5, 1906, at the Villa Cyrnos, two miles south of Pau, of some obscure valvular disease of the heart—something up to then scarcely precognised by the medical faculty. All or almost all causes of death in her system had been neutralised, warded

off, baulked, frustrated, sterilised by careful living and the vegetable drugs dispensed by the Société Droguiste des Pyrénées or by Harmon, Veneering and Co. But no French doctor had detected or suspected the advance of this obscure trouble in the heart-valve. Had the seizure occurred in the day-time, when people were about her, she might have been restored to consciousness, the suspended functions of the heart might have been resumed before there was any change in the tissues. As it was, however, the heart must have stopped beating about one a.m., and the poor lady was unrestorably dead at seven in the morning when her maid entered the room.

Georgy Podsnap was so "heart-broken," whatever that term may mean—that kind of death is connected with the brain rather than the centre of our blood circulation—that she only outlived her old friend by some seven months, and died on January 10, 1907. The local doctor diagnosed the case as "acute influenza"; an absurdity, because the terror of influenza had died away before the efficient remedies patented by the Société Droguiste des Pyrénées and by Messrs. Harmon, Veneering. But neither of these mighty firms have yet discovered a cure for *real* heart-break. Corness and Crabtree (Professor Hastmann, Dr. Schlab, Messrs. Dorneckstein, and Mr. Loeb) say you can cure it by taking tabloids of their powerful detergent, "Ridimol," but this drug is looked at rather askance by the physicians of the Old World and seldom enters into their prescriptions.

Mme. de Lamelle had left her six or seven hundred pounds a year and many of her possessions to Georgy for her life and afterwards to be divided between Jeanne Dudeffrand and Mervyn Veneering. The remainder of her jewellery she bequeathed to her old friend, Anastasia Van Eering. Georgy, in like manner, in a will dated January, 1887, had left her £3,500

a year and all the rest of her property firstly to be enjoyed for her life by her dearest friend, Sophie de Lamelle, and after her death to be divided equally between her other two dear friends, Jeanne Dudeffrand and Mervyn Veneerng. So you will perceive that by such a date, in 1907, as all these things could be rounded up and got out of the hands of the lawyers, Jeanne and Mervyn were becoming quite comfortably off. Mervyn, however, from out of his share in Georgy's estate, made over £500 a year to his mother as an additional income for her life, and £200 a year to his brother Lancelot. Jeanne took over the Villa Cyrnos as the permanent home of her family in the Basses Pyrénées, and engaged, or, with Mervyn's assistance, pensioned off the faithful servants of the two ladies.

CHAPTER XXII

ELIZABETH'S WEDDING MORNING

COMMON sense had at last prevailed in the House of Commons with the new Administration that had come into power at the end of 1905. In 1906, marriage with a deceased wife's sister, in all His Majesty's Dominions outside the United Kingdom, was recognised as a legitimate marriage by the British Parliament in Great Britain and Ireland. In the spring of 1907 legislation was passed authorising this marriage taking place in the United Kingdom.

For a year before the rainy summer of 1907, therefore, Elizabeth Veneering had been regarded, theoretically, as an honest woman; and several ladies of distinction—in their own eyes—had hastened to leave cards on Mr. and Mrs. Veneering at No. 1, Wigmore Street.

Elizabeth, in her own opinion, had been properly married to her husband fourteen years before at the registry office in Cape Town. Nevertheless, for her children's sake more than for her own, she desired to be married to Mervyn by the law of England at Chacely Church as soon as it had ceased raining, and they had attained the leisure of the autumn. The Revd. Frank Milvey, the comparatively new vicar of Chacely, with whom she conferred, was of the new order of clergy who had agreed to drop the three-thousand-year-old nonsense of Exodus-Leviticus, and to inhibit no marriage that was not an offence against physiological prescriptions, such as near blood-relation-

ship or serious disease. He and Elizabeth, therefore, arranged that the marriage should take place on the morning of the 15th of October, quite quietly and unceremoniously. She told Mervyn, Sir John and Lady Harmon, Reggie, Madison and Helen, and her children—under promises to say nothing about it.

October 15, 1907, dawned gloriously, and at eight o'clock it was a brilliant morning. At that time young Hetty Veneering was placing a wreath on her dead mother's tomb in Chacely churchyard. The small wreath she had made herself the night before of greenhouse lilies, rose-pink and white. A slight rustle behind—she turns her face—"*Mother!*" she cries. It is Elizabeth, her mother's sister and successor, advancing over the mown turf with another wreath of white carnations and myrtle sprigs. As a matter of fact they meet not infrequently with these little tokens of remembrance at the tomb of the dead woman. Elizabeth's eyes, this time, were shining with tears—perhaps—but also with happiness. Her dark hair was uncovered and almost without a grey strand in its rich black-brown, though she is thirty-six—and Hetty, the younger, nearly eighteen.

"Darling! I might have guessed you would be here too, though I said nothing to you yesterday."

These words might have been uttered simultaneously by both of them. Elizabeth puts her circle of flowers at one end of the raised stone coffer above her sister's grave, and adjusts the wreath of the younger Hetty at the other end. Each places an arm round the other's waist and they stand thus, silent for a minute.

"Come, dearest of my children," says Elizabeth, "we must be going back to breakfast—and there is so much else to do to-day."

"'Dearest of my children,'" replied Hetty, walking away with her, their arms entwined. "That is a sweet thing to say. . . . Is it true?"

"Yes, quite true. But a secret between you and me. Don't tell it to the others. I like each in turn to think itself the specially beloved. I only tell you the true truth—because something—your mother's spirit? . . . who can say—dictates the words? To me you seem, in a measure, my sister come back. . . . You will soon be eighteen, and grow more like her every day. . . ." They walked, arms round waists, in silence, the rest of the way.

Then breakfast—and orders to give and preparations to suggest for a lunch that day to many. "Our wedding breakfast!" Elizabeth says to her cook, "and a dinner perhaps afterwards to the same number." The cook looks very wise, as if she definitely knew even more about it all than her rather flurried, blushing mistress.

Madison and Helen and their four children were in the hall as Elizabeth returned from seeing cook. "You dearest of dears," she exclaimed, "I haven't a moment to lose. *Must* change my dress."

Her wedding costume was sober in cut, but beautiful and restful in colour—a silk that changed and rippled in tint between dark crimson, glowing carmine, and bluish grey; and the hat that went with it was of crimson with a white ostrich plume. Thus dressed, she and Mervyn—Mervyn in a black morning coat, white waistcoat, and black, faintly-striped trousers, with a dark crimson rose in his button hole and a dull crimson tie—set out to walk to the village church—quite unceremoniously. They were followed by their six children, each carrying a little bunch of dark red roses.

Sir John Harmon and his wife pretexted things to see to up to the very last, and admonished their going first to church to set every one's mind at rest. They, the parents, could steal in quietly if they were late. A pony carriage was taking Reggie and Helen (Helen

was approaching a confinement). Madison would walk down just behind the children. And so on, and so on——

The church, when they entered it, seemed curiously full for a weekday and an occasion most carefully kept private. It was indeed packed, as they proceeded to their places before the Communion rails.

The Revd. Frank Milvey enters. The marriage service, shortened to its essentials, is proceeded with. They are married (again) and they proceed to the vestry to write their names in the books. John Harmon and Bella are there—kisses and wrung hands. But the vestry is full of other persons, other faces. . . . Elizabeth tries to be business-like before giving way to affection. . . . Something in the formulas before her on the vestry table disturbs her. . . . Curious letters attached to Mervyn's name, a strange prefix against hers. . . . She looks up at her father. . . . "Is there any mistake here? Is my eye-sight wrong?"

"No mistake, darling, but you are to-day—at any rate—and shortly will be in perpetuity 'Lady Veneering.' The King—I have been telling your surprised husband—has, on the advice of the Home Secretary, conferred on Mervyn a K.C.B., in recognition"—Harmon cleared his throat and spoke louder—"in recognition of the splendid work he has done for medicine and the curing of diseases. . . . We are calling him to-day 'Sir Mervyn,' and you 'Lady Veneering,' and very shortly that is what every one will say, when the King has knighted your husband."

The vestry seemed as full as ever. Elizabeth and Mervyn finished signing the forms and looked round. . . . "What!—Gaston!—JEANNE!—MOTHER? . . ." And Mrs. Veneering or Madame Van Eering advanced and executed a very charming old-fashioned curtsey before Elizabeth could embrace her. . . . And George Sampson and Aunt Lavvy were there, Aunt Lavvy

trying to look amiable, George not trying, but being so full-hearted as to be dumb, and muscular in his hand grips.

The vestry emptied. Mervyn gave Elizabeth his arm, their children reassembled and followed. They walked down the central aisle of the empty church, through the old porch, out into the golden sunlight and the golden glory of the autumn foliage. They saw, stretching before them up to Chacely Priory, half a mile away, two long rows of men, women, and children, and an empty road through open gates between them. As they emerged to walk home, arm-in-arm, a great shout went up in bass, tenor, and treble:

"Sir Mervyn and Lady Veneering! . . . Long live —Sir—Mervyn—and—Lady—Veneering!"

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